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ONLY EVE.

By MRS. J. CALBRAITH LUNN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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ONLY EVE.

CHAPTER I.

SLANDER AT FRAMBOROUGH.

THE day of the expected trial of Captain Jones was approaching, and there were whispers in the little borough of framework knitters that this would only be the introduction to another accusation of more importance, because of rarer precedent, even the arraignment of the Master of Wyckam.

Mr. Cameron took many thoughtful walks in his wareroom now, disturbed and anxious on behalf of this friend of his boyhood, whose light and pleasure-seeking nature had been rather estranging; but who was all the less able to bear this revulsion, this scorn of his

most cherished pride, this outrage on the best part of his disposition.

"Slander is such a hydra-headed monster," thought he, "half measures only add to its venom and its vigour; and yet any vehement onslaught may bring about the very evil we must avoid, a direct attachment of this infamous charge. If such a thing were to be, poor Forrest would never raise his handsome head from the dust."

If for a moment George Cameron suffered the light of any selfish feeling to play over his features, it was an involuntary surrender to the natural man, as some of the less glorious instincts are called. It is possible that some latent and low desire rose, and defied him to be eager and active in defence of the fair fame of his rival, whose abasement might remove the chief barrier to his own and only delight and solace; but if this were so, it was as surely repressed. His strongly-marked face showed that his life knew many conflicting emotions; but victory, as well as defeat, bears its signs of the burden and the strife.

He had been to Box Court two or three times; at first to talk quietly with Daniel

Fletcher about this mischief he was sowing, and afterwards to threaten, and even to plead; but the ignorant and vain democratist fancied he was avenging an old and a crying wrong, and thought he should be false to his sense of honour if he let this chance of reprisal escape him. He had not raised the report in the first instance, he said, but it was too good an opportunity for him, and he should keep the ball going now. He knew no more about Will than Mr. Cameron did, but was not likely to impeach his own flesh and blood, if he had known all about him.

Since the aspect of this unparalleled rumour had become so serious, Mr. and Mrs. Cameron had held frequent consultations on it, and each had discovered that the other knew Fred Forrest's secret, and that this rumour, if not speedily crushed, must lay it bare. There was apparently no possibility of crushing it. Latterly the innuendoes in the public papers, and those mysterious breathings of malice or idle gossip that float about all social grades and gatherings, had changed their character; and instead of tainting a good old name, they hinted at incomprehensible supineness, which

could only imply guilty consciousness, and must issue in arrest and trial. Then George Cameron went over to Wyckam to consult freely with this victim of intrigue or temptation.

Mr. Forrest was making up his parish books ready for the audit on the following day, and he seemed to have been working with difficulty and much annoyance to himself.

"You are come very opportunely," said he, looking quickly up, and the lines as suddenly retreating from his brow. "You will lay these papers before the auditors to-morrow, and get them signed for me?"

"Why not take them yourself, you are not ill?" Cameron asked, noticing with some concern the change the last few weeks had made in the farmer's face and figure.

"Oh no, not particularly; but I will not face the borough roughs again."

"But will it not be injurious to you to take any directly different course that may challenge remark?"

"It may; but as I become a target for the rough wit of your borough whenever I show myself, I think the more I keep in the shade

the better. As soon as this trial is over I shall go abroad, and sell or let Wyckam."

The quiet, restrained tone in which most men speak when under the influence of strong feeling, gave their true effect to his words, and excited his companion's sympathy.

"I do not think it will do for you to give up any of your public duties just now; and I am sure you must not leave the country. Why, I would not do that, and I have only my old mother to leave."

"Thank God, my mother is dead!"

Mr. Forrest's ejaculation sounded like a groan forced from him by a strong and painful conviction.

There was a pause, Mr. Cameron taking his habitual march through the room.

"I would go away immediately, but for Jones. My absence might be ascribed to pusillanimity, and do him harm," Mr. Forrest said, resuming his quiet manner by a strong effort.

"Of course it would; but are you anxious for Jones's acquittal?"

"Yes."

"You do not believe in his guilt, then?"

"I certainly did not ; do you ?" Forrest asked.

"I thought everybody did," said Cameron, who had really very little doubt about it. "Come out into the garden," he added, wishing to get more to the core of this intricate affair, and vaguely feeling that a change of circumstances might afford more facility.

They took a turn or two along the drive, and then entered the narrow laurel-bordered path, and Cameron took his companion's arm to get more within the focus of his voice, as he asked, "How did you get acquainted with this Captain Jones?"

"At Ghent : he was buying things for the army ; that is his regular calling, you know."

"How long have you known him?"

"Oh, I first saw him ten or twelve years ago, more than that perhaps. I was a venturesome young fellow then, and liked to try my skill at everything. We met at a gaming-table, and he good-naturedly gave me a hint that probably saved me from some trouble. He turned up again in London some years after, and I thought he might as well come down here and help you Framborough

hosiers off with some of your wares. Lately he has changed his commerce, and buys cattle instead of clothes, I believe."

"How came he to know Sophy Fletcher?" It was sixteen years since that name had been mentioned between these two gentlemen, and straightforward as Mr. Cameron was by nature, he had spoken with much effort now. He was instantly repulsed by Mr. Forrest's quick reply.

"I cannot explain these things to you, Cameron. It is impossible to make a man comprehend all the little involvements one gets into sometimes, and the schemes one has to invent to get out of them again. Indeed, the whole affair seemed to glide into mischief in a way that was never very clear to myself. It gave me infinite trouble, I know."

Mr. Forrest turned his face towards the house as he spoke, as though he would terminate the conversation before it became more perplexing.

"I do not require any particulars about your past life, Fred, on my own account, or from curiosity: it has occurred to me that some light might be thrown upon this strange

charge against you, if all were made known concerning your connexion with Jones," said Cameron, holding Forrest lightly by the arm.

"Impossible! It can have nothing to do with this scandal."

"If Daniel Fletcher has not raised this rumour in the first instance, he is doing all he can to extend it now."

Mr. Forrest started, and turned again into the shaded walk.

"Are you speaking from good authority?" he asked.

"I had the fact from himself. He says he has you in his hands, and will be avenged."

"The low-born rascal! He was not always so much whiter than his masters," Forrest replied indignantly.

"People are never too low-born to be injured with impunity; indeed the lower your victim the more subtle and sure the retribution, because it comes from within chiefly," Mr. Cameron remarked with some resentment.

The tone did not fail to touch Forrest. "Perhaps you know all?" he asked.

"Most probably I know all."

"From information or inference?"

“From inference.”

“Then you will agree with me in supposing that we need not give ourselves any more trouble in trying to arrest this malediction. I was always a worthless fellow, though it has taken much to convince me of the fact. Indeed I think it was your hand that first opened my eyes,” said Forrest, his moody tone opposed by something like a smile.

Cameron did not look as though he felt the compliment of this allusion in a pleasing manner; but he shook heartily the extended hand as he said, “You were always an odd combination of the qualities that go to make up a man; you had one or two in excess, and that made the discords too blaring. I suppose, indeed, this is the case with us all; but in some the false chords are struck too softly to reach the world’s ear. As to arresting this malediction, as you call the infamous rumour, we must not let a wrong go on accumulating, as wrong always will accumulate, if it be not arrested. For my part I shall leave no old stone unturned to right this wrong, if you are too supine to do it for yourself. This is due to the old house that

has a martyr's name amongst its records, a martyr to a good cause, mind you."

"It is for the sake of the old house that I would fain be quiet."

"I did think for some time that it would be better to be quiet, and that the calumny would die a natural death from inanition. I must tell you, however, that it was this complication with the Fletchers which made me inactive so long."

"I still think the calumny must be suffered to wear itself out," said Forrest, with a pertinacity which appeared as strange as it was injudicious.

This obstinacy irritated Mr. Cameron, who replied sharply, "Do you not see that there is not the slightest chance of its wearing itself out?" Then, without any apparent notion that he was taking a liberty with another man's affairs, he continued, "I looked in at Lockyer's office this morning to assure myself before coming here. He said that though the affair was altogether infamous, you had most likely some enemy in the background, determined to push the thing to extremities, and that it certainly was advisable to be prepared for the worst."

Mr. Forrest, who knew his friend was not punctilious when he fancied he was necessary, appreciated his motives. Besides, he was aware that his own conduct had placed the first barrier in the way of their confidential friendship, so he could but reply with perfect amenity, "Surely no attorney would be found to take up this case against me!"

"Ay, indeed! Your cousin's husband would undertake any thing. I suppose he thinks a living by pettifoggery is better than starvation. I think with Lockyer, that every thing lies in giving the first blow. See him tomorrow, or, better still, come with me now, before Kettering gets any more head. Of course no one believes you are a rascal; but it may not be impossible to prove you one; and I have no doubt Kettering could do it."

Mr. Cameron was too much in earnest to perceive the pertinency of his remark; but Mr. Forrest laughed in spite of himself, thus grossly tempting this severe censor of the intelligence of men, who incontinently called him a fool.

Mr. Forrest took his judgment meekly. "What would you advise me to do if I see Lockyer?" he asked.

"You will have to tell him all that passed between you and Jones in the hay-loft, and, most likely, account for the apparent intimacy between you."

"I don't see what good could come of that: I did not know that it was Jones who was in the loft."

"Well, you can please yourself, of course; but Lockyer is a respectable person, and, if he understands his case, will go about it with a better heart. Of course he will attach Fletcher for libel, and in self-defence he may retract or give his authority."

"You mean that I ought to proceed at once in bringing an action against Fletcher for defamation of character?"

"Yes, surely there is no great difficulty about doing that. Those fellows must be taught how to behave themselves: if he had been a gentleman I should have told him what he was before he had gone as far as this."

"I cannot attach Daniel Fletcher for defamation; I should simply increase the evil, and bring a hornet's nest about my ears," Forrest exclaimed, with a decision most foreign to his natural manner.

Mr. Cameron interrupted with an impatient ejaculation. "It is arrant foolery to put your old sins in the balance against this slander. You've been bad enough I daresay, and deserve to be punished; but not in this way. It would be sheer injustice to send you to Botany Bay for highway robbery, because sixteen years ago you were not proof against a handsome woman, who paraded her fine person for the temptation of any one whom it might concern, I don't doubt."

"You push the case to an extreme," said Forrest gently. "How can I be sent to Botany Bay, because there is no purse forthcoming? Jones may be guilty or innocent; so far as I know he is reckless enough for any thing. If nothing is found against him, he must be acquitted. You would never hang a man on such evidence as Cotswold brings; and if Jones is acquitted, there can be nothing against me."

"Do you mean to say that you do not feel the obloquy of this charge the public makes against you; that it is a taint for ever on the old name? Why, man, this scandal will never be laid! It will dog your steps wher-

ever you go, the farther all the more surely and sullenly. Think of the son of Squire Forrest, the master of Wyckam, the gentleman of our Framborough parties, running his country with this thief's cry in his ears ! It will sink you living, and ban you dead !”

“You must have patience with me, George,” said Forrest, in a tone so unlike the usual one of the happy, pleasure-loving Fred, even Mr. Cameron felt as if he might have drawn his picture in colours too heavy and dreary.

They walked up and down the path for some minutes in silence, the harsh sound of the gravel under their boots grating painfully on Cameron's nerves, his infirmity having made him susceptible of any jarring sound, particularly if made by any movement of his own. Mr. Forrest was lost in his own painful thoughts. At last he stopped at the farthest point from the house, and, facing his companion, said hurriedly—

“I am not dealing altogether openly with you in this matter : your intolerance of any thing like weakness in other people has always been rather overpowering ; but you were

tender to my little girl in her distress ; and perhaps you might not turn your back on me if you knew all my pitiable story. And yet I cannot tell you all, but only the damning fact, that I do know where that purse of gold is concealed, which is supposed to have been stolen from the cheesefactor."

Too much amazed to give his ears any credit, Cameron asked, "What do you say about the cheesefactor's purse?"

"Simply that I know where the purse is, which is supposed to have been stolen from Mr. Cotswold."

"I don't believe you," said Cameron bluntly, speaking from his idea of possibilities. Then perceiving that his impetuosity had set up a complete barricade against further confidence, he asked as curtly what Mr. Forrest was befooling him for now.

"The knowledge came upon me as unexpectedly as this avowal has come to you. It seemed so like a stroke of some hard, mocking fate, that I have been almost overwhelmed, certainly unmanned by it."

"But there was so little time in the hay-loft Jones could not have said anything the

officials did not hear, much less have given you a purse."

"I did not get my information from Jones : I was quite ignorant, not only of the purse but of the bruit, till the rumour had been pretty freely sown in Framborough. I was saluted by some of your young stocking-makers one day, and on the next I was burdened by a secret that gave a stinging meaning and point to the base insinuation."

"Did I understand you to say that you could not, or would not, tell me how this knowledge came to you?"

"I cannot tell, being under a sort of promise, which, at present, must be considered binding."

"Did you make this promise before or after the information was given you?"

"The information was given in consequence of the rumour, as being something I ought to know; the promise was required inconsistently enough, but under circumstances that seemed to warrant me in making it. I felt that it was very inconvenient, perhaps foolish; but I did not think it could prove very mischievous. My own consciousness aggravates

this misfortune every day, so much so, that I am making arrangements to go abroad immediately after the trial of Jones." Mr. Forrest's explanation was given in a blundering manner, which seemed to confuse the matter more.

"Then I had better call on Lockyer, and stop any proceeding he may have entered upon?" Mr. Cameron asked; "unless you are disposed to reconsider this promise."

The tone was rather cynical, but Mr. Forrest's mistakes and misfortunes induced him to take a meek view of his own deserts just now; so he could only thank his well-meaning friend for the championship of which he could not avail himself, and await the issue of events in patience and alone.

Though no reservation had been made with this strange avowal, as to its dangerous properties, Mr. Cameron was convinced of the importance of secrecy. Recollecting what Bernard Fielding had told him of Will Fletcher's story the night they had met at Box Court, he thought he was warranted in suspecting this Will-o'-the-wisp, not only of having the stolen money in his keeping, but

also of having furnished Mr. Forrest with this very ill-timed and perilous knowledge concerning it.

However this might be, he had reached the limit when further interference would be unwise as well as thankless. To dive deeper into such turbid waters, required much more assurance than he possessed of making a clean, or even safe issue.

The idea did occur, that possibly Kitty might have been made a medium of communication, as Will would certainly not risk his own priceless person in any quixotic enterprise; but with the usual weakness of one whose tenderer qualities are deeply overlaid by a cynical habit, he shrank with something like fear from an interview with the dying girl.

Still each day that passed seemed so burdened with important issues, Cameron could not persuade himself that he was right in letting things alone; so with a shy, reluctant courage he knocked at the Fletchers' door, just two days after they had taken themselves to some more remote neighbourhood.

The widow, who had so charitably cared

for Kitty, appeared in answer to his hollow summons; explaining, with some indignation, that Daniel Fletcher had flitted by moonlight in a very suspicious manner, taking away his girl from those who were ready and willing to do for her to the last, when the poor thing was more fit for her coffin than a damp, lonesome house, with nobody to see that he did not starve or mope her to death. "And I warrant, you may be come, with something good for her now," the sympathetic little Samaritan added, with a smile that made Cameron wish he had so charged himself.

He assured her she was quite mistaken.

"Does not any one know where they are gone to?" he asked.

"No; they didn't confide in nobody. We might have been no better than police in make-believe clothes, for the trust they put in their neighbours," she responded, with the bitterness of a kindly soul that had been mistrusted.

"Has Mr. Bernard Fielding been here since they went away?" Mr. Cameron inquired, after a minute's reflection.

“No,” said the widow ; “and that makes me think Kitty may have told him more than me. She was always different like.”

In this conjecture she was right.

CHAPTER II.

THE HEAD FOR DIRECTION, THE HEART FOR LIFE.

MRS. CAMERON, sitting in her bed-room nursing herself through her last attack of bronchitis, which she would only treat as a common cold, had plenty to plan and think about without including herself. Intead of watching with the silent and invisible sister of destiny the frail, chafed thread of life wear itself through, she was busy weaving another strong vital thread of youth and love for those who were to outlast her. There was a grand, almost a prophetic air about her, as she waited, sufficient to herself, and lonely apparently—though her background was, probably, very fairly peopled—always upright, and always crowned with the clear high muslin cap, its frilled border meeting under her massive chin. Bernard Fielding, who was

something like a youthful priest, welcome and in harmony everywhere, said she made him think of Deborah under her palm tree, while the people came up to be judged ; and Deborah must have worn some such mystic head-dress. Once having sauntered into her kitchen, in the easy way he had of disposing of his spare moments, and having seen the old lady clap her hands enthusiastically without any corresponding festal light in her serene, wise countenance, he had asked what was the occasion of such unwonted plaudit, and had been told that it was this stiff, buoyant, translucent cap, which, to be restored, must be submitted to this strange treatment. No wonder he regarded it with awe.

For two or three days Mrs. Cameron's mind had concentrated its powers upon this one design, the marriage of Mary Elton with her son, and she fancied that circumstances were aiding her, even George himself, turning his strong will into the same direction. She had observed a change in his manner and appearance ; his coat was well brushed, and did not hang quite so listlessly about

him ; his linen was more visible and pure, his whole personality seemed to be brought up to the requirements of a state more exigent than the little world of the old wareroom. She had heard him expostulate with the servant about his boots, the dead and seedy aspect of which he said was peculiar to his things, and must be altered. All these signs determined her to give an impetus to the wavering inclination. Of course George never could be smooth and polished ; but if that hard spiny integument could be removed from the man's genuine nature he must appear to better advantage ; and that it was a nature to bear the shelling she did not doubt. She was equally satisfied that it was but a blind, instinctive effort he was making to get out of the old, lonely life, into one freer and more lovely ; and consequently that her hand was needed to direct, perhaps to aid. So, while disliking any allusion to her increasing weakness, and having an antipathy against the conventional forms of treating the great inevitable event, preferring to take her leave of the world in her own fashion, she sent for him one

night, with the intention of preparing him for the end of her management, and to direct him towards a substitute.

George began to talk about Frederick Forrest, saying he was afraid he meant to leave England immediately; he doubted whether he would even stay for the trial, so impatient he seemed to get clear of the murky atmosphere of this scandalous little borough. And if he should run away from his subpoena and evade Jones's trial he would take with him such a weight of accumulating calumnious disposition, that he might never be able to show his face at home again.

"And if he should go away?"—Mrs. Cameron fixed her eyes upon her son's, eyes that could ask questions with so much subtlety—"should you regret it very much, all things considered?"

"I used to like Forrest well enough; but latterly our friendship has seemed to be narrowing indefinitely."

"That is inevitable with friendship between men; their interests run so vehemently, either in opposite directions, when they must naturally fall apart; or towards the same

object, when they as naturally become rivals." Again Mrs. Cameron's quiet eyes seemed bent upon reading her son's mind.

"I could make no way with Forrest; he will not take advice or any reasonable measures," said George, attacking the bit of fire in the tiny grate till it threatened to become extinct. "It is surprising how those gay, careless fellows collapse before a bit of misfortune."

"I don't think it is to be wondered at; everybody petted Fred: even rigid and frigid old women like me must smile at his peccadilloes, and forget to see how certain little follies and gay graces glide into great sins. I should have sent you to bed without your supper, George, if you had dreamed of committing the levities I have thought only natural in him. Don't make so much noise with the poker; my voice is not strong at present, you know," Mrs. Cameron remarked, wishing to develope her idea; but feeling that certain delicate matters move better to low tones than with the higher, harsher pitch necessary to dull ears, and anxious always to save George from whatever difficulty there

might be, by ascribing it to her own feebler powers. She was still consistent with herself; her young ones had always been guarded with more of an eagle's defiance than a dove's tenderness; but any sign of suffering or dependence in her brood had brought her down to the level of ordinary feminine devotedness.

"I don't suppose the ways of Providence are either mended or marred much by our means," said George, rising.

"Perhaps not; but our own ways may be, and they are our chief concern. Stay a while longer to-night; the violono will last long after me; and, George, I want to tell you that it is time you looked out for my successor. You will be found stiff and stark in your old wareroom if you have no one to look after you, some of these days when I am dead and gone."

"You will last years yet, if you will but make up your mind to think so. Women are so easily depressed; they always see death in every little decadence," said George.

"Women are not depressed by any thing they have fairly lived up to, and I shall be

eighty-two next month; but that is neither here nor there. It is about Mary Elton I would talk to-night. You know pretty well what my wishes are, and I am pretty certain we are not out of accord in this instance; so perhaps you will admit for once that a woman's judgment may be worth acting upon."

It was not a cynical smile that received this bit of governance from the lady who had just declared her reign at an end. For the first time this allusion to her cherished project did not cause more pain than satisfaction. George was keeping his little new-born hope warm; and so thriving are a lover's fancies, that if there be any tenderness bestowed on them they become rather usurping. Yet he would not have his secret presumption discovered; so he said, "If you think we are both of one mind you surely might trust me to follow the promptings of my own judgment. It must come very much to the same result. Interference does no good."

"Yes, yes; but you are so slow and faint-hearted, and people get impatient of delays. If you had asked Mary when Mr. Forrest

first fell away, you would have had a very fair chance of success. Now that he has got into tribulation, there will be a counter-current of feeling in his favour; and if you wait until he is overwhelmed or out of the country, the chances will be dead against you."

"Why, mother, I may well be faint-hearted, if you show me I ought to be satisfied, to fill up the vacancy that would otherwise be shameful and intolerable!"

"You are so bent on misconstruction, George Cameron. Of course, if Mary Elton accepted you she could not either be miserable or disappointed; but would be right glad that she had been compelled to make a good choice at last."

This was such an unusually flattering speech George had doubts of its genuineness. Was she mocking him, setting before his consciousness, in this oblique and cutting way, all his deprivations and aptness at misfortune? That could not be; for since his last crowning trouble no one could have shown more consistently weak, womanly leaning towards one so overshadowed. He looked at her furtively, and believed at last

that this imperious, unyielding dame was at heart as much deluded by her maternal prejudices as the most demonstrative of indulgent mothers could be. He made a great effort to be amiable, but could only get half-way.

“Why do you try to flatter me into making myself ridiculous?”

“Is it ridiculous to seek for what you would fain have? Why the merest child does that.”

“Certainly; but then a child always thinks its desires ought to be potential. I have come through a good section of the course of experience; and have always been so ready to dub my fellows fools, I should be particularly open to retributive judgment. But tell me, mother, what makes you think that Mary Elton would ever listen to any thing from me?” George asked, willing to have some excuse for laying the flattering unction to his soul, in spite of all his protests.

“She comes to see me very often; and though I may be wise enough in my way, I don’t delude myself into supposing that young women care to read the book of life in this ungarnished form, or to look so far at

once into their future. Then she will sit darning at your fine cambric frills till my eyes ache with sympathy."

"Reasons impersonal enough for charity!"

"I am afraid, too, that she really is fond of your violono." As this *coup-d'état* only made her son laugh, Mrs. Cameron resumed her more natural mode of argument. "I never could imagine why men are so inconsistent. They want positive proof that they have only to ask and have; and yet they invariably consider such proof most unseemly and impolitic. There is a way of wooing that would make most men irresistible; but they are generally bent on having their own way, and so do not get that which is most desirable. I have no doubt that you, for instance, would make your suit either as if you were a king and made for conquest, or as a slave and already conquered, just as your mood might be; and in either case you would fail with such a girl as Mary Elton. Now, George, reach me my knitting; for, as Mrs. Poole constantly reminds me, some sedative is needed before one can go to sleep."

The smile, half-amused half-self-deprecatory, that played over the noble old face, as

she plied her needles to compose herself for her rest, betrayed her consciousness that she had exercised her managing and dictatorial tendencies rather widely ; but her son had given himself up so much to music and things that had no will of their own, it would be next to impossible for him to succeed, unprompted, with things that had a will of their own ; she considered, and she was probably right.

George Cameron went to his retreat, to think all this over for himself. He believed in his mother's judgment, and even admitted that in many things concerning the vagaries of their own sex, women might be more discriminating than men. Still, though he might suffer a hint or two, he would certainly not be biassed by any consideration he could not fully endorse from experience. So he thought, yet he found all his reflections and anticipations scintillating strangely before this motherly view of his deserts and prospects. Any direct sign of encouragement from Mary he could not call to mind ; but what could be the motive spring of his new-born hope—presumption it might be—if there had not been some latent encouragement ? Poor, plain, rugged in character and mien,

despising the ordinary methods of oiling the wheels of existence, and eccentric to a degree, he knew he was ; and yet he was actually contemplating alliance with youth, and grace, and goodness ; and it was to be a love-match, forsooth ! This would be foolishness in the extreme sense, if there were not some inspired power balancing the odds. It might be true, —his aged mother's wisdom declared it to be true—that love takes no account of these disabilities, that it even transfigures them ; making of them gracious opportunities of enthusiasm, self-surrender, and sacrifice,—all that love takes most delight in. It must be so, he thought, as his reflections became more imbued with the soft aerial tone of his happy mood. These inequalities and privations are needed to make of our human loves reflexes of the divine charity. But how will this theory work from Mary's position ? No matter, when love holds the beam, how the scales are weighted. Love's finger is omnipotent, and its miracles are not to be investigated by the unbelievers.

Cameron did not think himself into this state of triumph without several reverses, or

without the aid of the violono. He played between every mental pause; and, like a too fond and familiar friend, played upon by the master's mood, it responded to his hopes and winged his fondest desires. His inspirations were tender, dream-like, and intangible. Children of his soul, they drew him on into the wildest vagaries, never deluding, but possessing him with a spirit he could not recognize, though he must obey it as his own.

"I may be presumptuous and wrong, and you know all; and yet you answer dream with dream, and idle passion with airy, floating, mocking waves of harmony! My wife must not be so mobile, so elusive. She must have her own sweet will: it may fold with mine, but it must be of its own essence."

He smiled more like a happy, fortunate lover than a self-elected one, and caught himself up for the error as he placed the violono in its corner. Foolish and unreasonable he might be; but he assured himself again and again that he had never anticipated such fatuity; yet it was the most agreeable state of mind he had ever known; it made his manhood rich, impetuous and grand, as if he had been

looked upon by a god ; and he could not forego the bliss, not at least prematurely.

He stayed to make some arrangements for the work of the next day ; and as he ordered his shelves and looked over his accounts the light of happiness faded from his face, and the familiar lines settled over it again. Impressionable and compliant as any other child of genius, his new-born bliss could not bear the test of his ordinary sordid life. His hopes must have gone down, for he was leaving his room with the old signs of lonely care on brow and steps. He turned from the door again ; and taking the violono from its resting-place, played, " Lord, remember David." Now the intense moment had come, and he was not sufficient in himself to meet its sharp necessity. So long repressed, so without hope as not to be recognizable as love, his feelings towards Mary Elton had hitherto scarcely coloured his life ; but touched though ever so lightly by the warm southerly wind of hope, they flushed into a wondrously vigorous and usurping sentiment, its very strength revealing the weakness of its position, and the inadequacy of his own soul to meet a possible reverse.

CHAPTER III.

BERNARD FIELDING AND HIS SPHYNX.

THE attainment of his object seemed to George Cameron to become ever more desirable as he reflected upon it, and there was not any time to be lost. The result of this business upon which he had set his mind would influence all his future. The old, dreary life must be carried on to the end, becoming more dull and unsympathetic, as he would soon be left quite alone, or the grey monotony would give way before a golden aurora. His meditations created a beautiful home-life, whose delights widened and intensified, as if magically touched, and of course the urgency of the affair increased rapidly; man's love for woman, in a certain stage, not being a quality capable of the patience and endurance it is, after a time,

supposed to attain. At any rate, Mr. Cameron felt that he must put his fortune to the test, and he saw no reason for waiting until after this trial every one was talking about. In his present state of mind it appeared more straightforward and manly to go and ask Mary Elton to be his wife now, than to wait till Mr. Forrest had left the country. It would not be so much like stepping into a dead man's shoes.

This strong-minded and arbitrary man made himself ready to go with his plea for mercy from the hand of a young and gentle maiden, with a strangely trembling heart, and even more than his usual contraction of brow. As he made the necessary change in his dress he noticed this rugged, intensive look. "Certainly, I am no braw wooer," he thought, half disposed to be cynical concerning himself. However, it would be an impossible task to undertake to plane himself down to a "smooth uniformity," and perhaps as bootless; for he assured himself, were Mary as grey and rugged he should be just as thankful to win and wear her as his own.

Soon after eight o'clock Mr. Cameron

went forth on his great errand; and he was rather disheartened at the outset by meeting Bernard Fielding on the threshold. Bernard, too, was anxious and self-involved, and did not notice that he was an unwelcome apparition.

"Is your business very urgent?" he asked, scarcely pausing till the reply was given.

"Yes, of course it is," said the intercepted lover, impatiently.

"Could you give me half an hour? I will not detain you longer, and I do not think any one needs you more than I do just now," persisted Bernard.

Mr. Cameron took out his watch, though he knew the time to a minute, and re-entered his house in silence.

Bernard felt much difficulty in opening his important errand to Mr. Cameron, though every aspect of it had been turned over to whatever light his mind could cast upon it, for the last two days. He was suddenly troubled with an extraordinary difficulty of expression, as inconvenient as it was unusual.

"Do you recollect our unpleasant meeting at Mr. Elton's the other evening?" he asked.

"To be sure I do. Why?"

"It was very annoying; I have been thinking of it ever since. Mary must have been very much hurt, as well as vexed."

"I suppose she is used to it," said Cameron; and then, a pause ensuing, he added his ordinary and imperative interrogation, "Why?"

"Well, it was the first time, you know, she had heard of Mr. Forrest's unfortunate position; and then——"

Bernard hesitated, his companion seemed so difficult of access. He was, in fact, getting impatient, and this allusion to Mary's interest in Mr. Forrest was particularly inappropriate.

"Of course it would be unpleasant, but there is no particular interest in that direction now, you know," Mr. Cameron said rather shortly.

"Do you think not? I have always fancied that the old feeling was as strong and tender as ever. Some natures are essentially true. The first love must be the last, because it is just a manifestation of the best and noblest that can be conceived of. Miss Elton's Mr. Forrest was the creation,

even more than the reflection of her own soul, and so, to her mind, his name can never be tarnished."

"What nonsense!" Mr. Cameron ejaculated. "You allow your imagination unlimited licence. Miss Elton is not an imbecile."

"But you don't think she will ever transfer her affections, as this sort of infidelity is popularly translated?"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Cameron, in his provoking way.

"It would not be like her; it would be high treason of the most subtle sort; the soul's infidelity to its own sovereign, self-elected, self-endowed, and then foresworn!"

"I cannot follow you," said Mr. Cameron, impatiently. "What does all this mean now? I do not suppose Miss Elton's soul arrogates to itself infallibility. She is young enough to change her standard; intelligent enough to have her visual angle widened."

Bernard was getting more and more uncomfortable. He had hoped his sensible old friend would have helped him to reason himself out of a newly-aroused sense of

responsibility; a sense Mr. Elton's tipsy remark would never have called forth, had it not been for the peculiarly forlorn and conspicuous position in which his wretched conduct had placed his daughter. Detesting ambiguity and false positions, his natural ingenuousness was his only resource. Though feeling the excessive antagonism of Mr. Cameron's present mood, he must surmount it by his own, perhaps for the once, rather strained geniality; so he said, as simply as possible, "I had not the slightest idea she cared for me; but I suppose her father must think she does, or else——"

Bernard found further progress quite impossible; his own words had a strange artificial effect upon his own ears, and his listener looked at him as if he had undergone some monstrous transformation. Then he laughed outright.

"What earthly reason have you for thinking Miss Elton cares for you?" he asked, and the portentous brow was lowered, and an unpleasant light burned in the grey eyes of the stern-featured, world-worn man, as he questioned his youthful and well-favoured rival on his inappropriate idea.

"I have no reason at all. Did I not say I never thought of such a thing till her father suggested it?" said the young man modestly.

"Fathers know nothing about these things; they are always deluded about their children. They hedge them in with their own theories and limitations, till they have them, to their minds, as much cut off from the external and undefinable, as the specimens of a naturalist. Besides, Mr. Elton is a fool! Is that all you have to say?"

"Not quite," said Bernard, smiling, in spite of his discomposure, at the impetuosity of this reasoning. "I fancied you might help me to come to some conclusion, you are generally so quick at reading people's minds."

"So you thought I could read Miss Elton's mind, and that I was old, and grim, and disinterested enough to read it, with Mr. Bernard Fielding as its lord and governor; and to feel complacent about it?"

"How very realistic you are to-night! Is the violono out of tune?" asked Bernard, not with the faintest tinge of irony, for the old viollo was usually respectable enough

to account for anything. The master was in a most unnatural mood, for he replied tartly, "So you think I am so far beyond the pale of humanity as to have my idea of life dependent on the precision of the little, upright post of an old fiddle!"

His heart relented the moment after he had been guilty of this blasphemy against the soul of his violono, and Bernard was shocked. He had no clue to this mental disturbance, unless the old affection, which he had suspected long ago, was too vital to die a reasonable death, and was re-asserting itself now. If this were the case, he had nothing more to say, except that he would intrude no longer. They had both kept on their hats all this time, this habit being too common at Framborough to be any sign of disrespect; but as Mr. Cameron did not seem disposed to leave the house in his company, and yet was evidently anxious to depart, Bernard said he would go and have a chat with the Sphynx, as he designated George's mother.

"Stop a moment," cried Cameron, with whom reflection was always a rapid process; "I am rather weighted with my own concerns,

but I can still spare you five minutes. What did you come to me for to-night?"

Bernard turned from the door, his perfect temper, evident from his face, and a slight curiosity concerning his friend inducing him to prolong the conversation; though he had discovered that he had erred in expecting help in a matter so purely personal as this self-imposed obligation. "It is rather an absurd affair to be asking advice about," he said; "but then you know I have never been particularly in love; and it seems such a difficult matter to set about."

"Thank heaven!" ejaculated Mr. Cameron from the depths of his over-balanced soul. "I was afraid it was otherwise."

Pretending not to divine anything from this peculiar burst of gratitude, Bernard went on, "At least I do not wish to set about it at present; but is it expected from me now?"

"Certainly not!"

Mr. Cameron's veto sounded so like a roar of defiance, Bernard laughed, and took the stairs three at a time, delighted to find that a better man than he could consider himself might fulfil any imperious obligations, that

society in the person of Mary's father might be raising.

Mrs. Cameron's spirits, usually equable, were rather high. That mysterious inter-communion that exists between many people whose lives are passed together, must be clearer-sighted between a mother and her child. This penetration had divined something of an unusually pleasant nature going on in George's mind, and she wanted to be assured.

"Have you seen my son?" she asked, in reply to a different question.

"I have just left him; but I believe he is gone out. Do you want him?"

"Oh, no! Was he dressed?" she knew her motherly solicitude would not be misinterpreted, as she added, "Did he look happy?"

"Yes, in his best," said Bernard gaily; and he looks young and handsome almost. His manner is full of a divine purpose; and he seems certain of accomplishing his purpose triumphantly."

Mrs. Cameron smiled, "I am glad you think so," she replied. "You ought to be

something of a prophet, for you are something of a poet. But why do you think this of my son to-night? He has not told you anything?"

"His eyes are lighted as if some angel had looked into them."

"Ah! Now you are going beyond even my maternal credulity. You know I do not believe in angels."

The old lady, with all her peculiarities, could always talk with Bernard more freely than with George, because age, if lived up to properly, has a more delicate perception, and does not permit so many distractions as must surround a man in middle life. She and Bernard were nearer to the source of inspiration, though her face, being turned towards the mount of visions, was the more divinely illuminated. The light and freedom of his mind were particularly grateful to her; the precision and sternness of her own clear intellect having fair play without any painful recoil. Bernard, too, felt privileged and brightened in the presence of this calm, self-contained sphynx, who he believed was in the way to solve many secrets, if she would turn those thought-freighted eyes steadfastly

towards the spirit-realm, instead of bestowing too much consideration upon the men and things of the present. For his poetic soul was often invaded by keen-edged questions and arrowy aspirations; and though he could lull it into ease and sweet contemplative contentment by his music and his verses, it was essentially a wakeful and a craving soul, or it would have been no power. With him, however, music and poetry were the resources of his nature as well as the expression; while she, being neither poet nor musician, but having abundance of energy and heart, could not help being interested in the people and occupations of the present. He was delighted if he could get her into what he called a prophetic mood.

“But why do you not believe in angels?” he asked.

“Because I never saw either man, woman, or child who could develope into anything so deficient in human characteristics, so abnormally beautiful.”

“When I was a child I always had a peculiar reverence for the white fleecy clouds that heap themselves together with such

still, mysterious grandeur; for I fancied that they were the resting-places of the angels. Their wings must get tired with bearing up such smoothly-rounded nerveless limbs, you know," said Bernard. "But of course I soon learned that the angels our childhood accepts so readily, are made so welcome and beautiful, that aspiration and service may be fair realities to us, materialized as we must be for the present."

"I would rather that people talked and wrote about the humanities. Let us leave the angels till we are fitly introduced into such high company," Mrs. Cameron rejoined, with her acute smile. How much do you musicians know?"

"Ah, you are deriding us musicians now! I admit there has always been an irresistible attraction to composers in the conception of these beings, that are supposed to float between the boundaries of earth and heaven; music itself being affianced to neither world, but having its points of contact with earth and heaven."

"I am no musician," Mrs. Cameron exclaimed, with a decision that implied

much thankfulness therefor. "Still I do not doubt that music, like any other art, might help the world we live in, if those who make it their business would keep to what is reasonably sensible. I daresay it is better even for men than card-playing is for women. We have this advantage, however; our cards do not confuse our brains, but leave us at liberty to think and act between whiles. You cannot all say as much of your doings."

Bernard knew her vein of irony: she was used to satirize herself as well as her son.

"Well, I trust your chief cause of complaint against music will be removed very soon," he said. "I only hope the violono will not be consigned to a living tomb. Mary is judicious as well as faithful, or I should fear." Then he told of George's treason against the old viol.

Mrs. Cameron looked from her knitting earnestly into Bernard's face, "You are assured of his present mission, then, and of his success?"

"I should think Mr. Cameron has only to make up his mind to an undertaking to succeed," Bernard replied honestly as hopefully.

"You comfort me: I was rather afraid I might be flattering myself. For do you know, since I became so indisposed to leave my room, I have fancied a keener insight into other people's minds has been given me; and though I have tried hard to bring poor George up to the crucial point, and have no doubt about his feelings, Mary has never come within my sphere. We love each other, but that is all; we do not trust. I could not bear to leave him without knowing that he had tried bravely for the prize he longs for; and yet to know that he has tried and failed would be a bad ending for me. I am ashamed of this want of faith; but so it is."

"Heaven forbid that he should fail!" Bernard exclaimed fervently.

"Bernard, how comes it you have never cared to try for the pretty, gentle-tempered little maid yourself?" Mrs. Cameron asked, with the natural feeling that her son's desire must be an universal one.

"I don't expect ever to care for any one, except my mother and my muse."

"But, my boy, your mother cannot live for ever. To be sure she is twenty years

younger than I am; but I am exceptionally old to be in this world. I should think she would like to see you married; a man is so helpless and desolate if he has himself wholly on his own hands; and music and poetry are only well when every thing else is right."

"I must be an exception to the rule that prevails amongst men; for I can keep the house and fill it with company as well as any woman. Miss Serle says she would rather visit us than any people she knows," said Bernard. Then he had to get over a blush Mrs. Cameron's suggestive smile called over his face. "Oh, there is nothing in that," he added quickly. "Seriously, I don't think my mother would like to be superseded; and I have not even the moral reason for choosing one particular love; for instead of beginning at the beginning, as philosophers say we must, and loving from the maiden to the race through all the stages, I am already at the end, and cannot submit my soul to any such retrograde process as selecting an individual. Probably I shall die first. I have always thought that would be better."

This was rather a favourite notion of Bernard's. Gifted, gracious, beloved, and happy, he yet liked to think that he had ripened prematurely, and that there was not sufficient of the earth element about him to detain him for the ordinary process of existence.

"That is selfish and sentimental," said Mrs. Cameron, who was aware of this little weakness in her young friend's character, and who did not approve of leaving a weakness to become chronic. "To be sure, you may die early; one cannot fathom the designs of Providence even concerning ourselves; but if you do, depend upon it you will have to go through the regular course of development somewhere. As certainly as you would be ashamed to go as a man amongst men, with the flexible rounded limbs and facile smile of childhood, you would feel out of place amongst the purified ones, if your spirit had had no probationary chrism from human joys and sorrows. But I need not preach; you will know all for yourself in a few years, my poor Bernard. When your soul set about gathering to itself the needful material for its appearance here, it was a

bright and fastidious little soul to begin with, and would only grasp and conquer of the best; and so it will continue: all its appliances must be of the best and fairest; so it is a question of time, and will be none the easier to solve when the time does come, as come it surely will, unless—Bernard, did you ever care for my little Susan?”

Mrs. Cameron’s eyes were full of love and pity as they met the beautiful, truthful ones of her young friend.

“I ought to go now, for I am the second great demand that society has made upon you to-day,” said Bernard evasively. “Miss Elton told me that Mr. Peeke had been to see you, and stayed more than an hour.”

Mrs. Cameron’s antagonistic expression usurped the place of the clear sphynx-like wisdom. “Yes; he had heard of the meeting of the whist-club here, and thought it his duty to come and expostulate. Indeed he used some very strong language; and I am afraid I didn’t control myself as I ought to do, with one foot in the grave. I never could bear much interference, and one does not mend in that respect, with age.”



"Why should he wish to interfere with the only little amusement you have? You have neglected no duty, and your play has never been deep enough for those clubs and spades to hurt your soul."

"Perhaps not, but he put the case forcibly, reminding me in flattering terms that I, being a city set on a hill, caused my baleful light to shine for the beguilement of many, and that weaker and more responsible sisters or mothers fell in consequence. He meant well, and was right in fact, but those scriptural illustrations, so misapplied, always make me rebellious, and I asked him what women were to do when age and infirmities had made books and work impossible; and when he said there are conversation and knitting always at hand, I so far forgot my sex as to advise him to try what he could do with Framborough gossip and a solitary stocking. "Listen, Bernard!" she exclaimed, dropping her work and looking grave. "That is George's step: how heavy and hopeless it sounds."

The heavy, hopeless footsteps ascended the warehouse stairs, and the door was shut;

but presently the tones of the violono stole through.

“That’s no pæan,” said Bernard.

Mrs. Cameron looked as if the burdens of a decade of time had suddenly fallen upon her. Soul and body seemed to shiver and suffer for another’s sake. “God is trying me sorely at the last,” she exclaimed, seeming to forget she was not alone. “I wish I had been more tender towards the boy. Poor George !”

Bernard went away silently. His little love-dream, brief and immature though it had been, had made him understand and feel for more complicated natures.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW WOOER FOR MARY.

IN the meantime George Cameron had been solving for himself the great question of his life ; for with him the particular individual love was as essential to the well-being of his soul as music and poetry and the universal charity were to Bernard's. The little cloud which had been scarcely recognized in his horizon as more than a film of vapoury light, had spread and condensed till all his heaven was overshadowed ; and he must know without delay whether it was to be a beneficent cloud to dispense its blessings over his life, or to hang there sullen and darkening for ever. He had no misgivings when he closed his door and went down the street to put his fate to the test ; for though neither self-complacent nor vain, he was a

sanguine-tempered man, and could generally see a favourable issue to any great desire. Besides, he was going to offer the best of all possessions, the love of a strong, loyal heart, and the devotion of a life; and with his grand idea of love as of the very essence of the divine charity, why should he tremble? He had been to see Mary nearly every night during the last few weeks, to take her any little news, as he had promised; and each time he had felt quite free from doubt; for though he had never ventured upon a personal interest, and had not changed the manner of their old friendship, her eyes had brightened as he went in, and she had seemed contented by his presence. He was as sure there was nothing insincere in Mary as he was of himself.

There would inevitably be a difference in the lover's bearing as he stood at last before the beloved one, with that most momentous question in his eyes, and Mary felt it instantly. She was incapable of trifling, and dissimulation was as difficult; but she had great power over herself, and this self-command had been strengthened and developed

into tact and resource by the trials of her existence, every day. With the quick perception of the crisis at hand, she decided upon what was to be done. Strongly as she had felt the necessity of guarding the futile fidelity of her affection for Mr. Forrest from every eye, now she must declare it, or her want of ingenuousness would be mere selfish pride, and compromise another. Without waiting a moment for Mr. Cameron's mission to declare itself, she told him as steadily as possible, though with much confusion, that she had made up her mind to be present at the trial which was to take place in the following week. "You will perhaps wonder," she said, "why I should concern myself so much with this affair, but, you know, I was engaged to Mr. Forrest; and I cannot forget or cease to feel that his honour is as dear to me as it can be to himself—dearer than all the world beside."

She felt the recoil with which Mr. Cameron heard this declaration. Though they had talked about Mr. Forrest and his ambiguous position so many times, he had never supposed that her interest had been so deep and

sustained. All at once the shadow was lifted, and he shuddered in the cold, bare certainty that he and his love were nothing to Mary Elton in comparison with Frederick Forrest and his indifference. Her look and manner, perhaps more than her words, convinced him that this was the fact to be educed; for she met his glance of anxious appeal with eyes that filled with tears, and her voice touched his heart with its pathos. Yet he would not accept his misery, for it seemed to him that more than life depended upon the result of his suit.

"Mr. Forrest's position is a trying one, but he could clear himself if he chose, at least of this difficulty," he said, rather bitterly. "There are people worse off than he is, whose ill-fortune is no fault of their own. But mind, I don't say that he is to be blamed in this matter: he thinks he must not clear himself," Cameron added, and then impetuously checked himself, for the ground was tender under his feet, and the temptation to say the word that might free him from this rival was strong for the moment; and he knew it was in his power to say that word.

"I don't think I understand you : there can be no difficulty in denying this false charge. It is a taint upon his honour in his own eyes, no doubt ; but it can do him no harm, and makes no difference in his friends' estimate of him," said Mary. "You think none the worse of him, Mr. Cameron, because of this misfortune, and we may judge of others by ourselves," she continued, speaking more earnestly as no response was made, and she wished to make her point clear.

"No, I think none the worse of him, perhaps rather better indeed ; and if I were as free a believer in an impending providence as he is, I should be thankful that the deeds done in the body should get themselves so summarily avenged. As it is, I can only be conscious that it is as useless to try to break the chain that binds some men to a low and lonely life, as it is to interrupt the laws of cause and effect."

Poor Cameron's wooing was taking a strange turn : he was aware of his inaptitude ; but the disappointment had come so suddenly, and in such an untoward way. He would take no unworthy advantage of

Forrest, even to further this great interest, but the trial was not the less a hard one; and the natural irritability of his temper was returning with the withdrawal of the hope which had made life seem so gracious for the last few weeks.

Mary's heart swelled. She could say nothing, for she had no comfort to give. She looked at the lined and agitated face before her, at the noble head, silvering fast under the power of an overwrought soul, and all the respect and affection of her life intensified, till she almost longed to be able to be the one restoring charm and solace; but she knew also that Cameron would now as unwillingly receive a mere offering of sympathy as she would give a delusive hope. Though unable to account for the undying sentiment that still bound her, there it was; and she could not reason with her heart.

A drowning man may catch at a straw, but a noble and true-hearted man sees not even a straw to catch at, if the woman he would wed can simply give him pity for his love. He knew Mary too well, not to be certain that he had deceived himself; and that she

was perfectly ingenuous, and free from the selfish vanity that would encourage a vain courtship; but Cameron had no false pride, and where he loved he could surely trust; so, though there was nothing to be hoped for, he would tell her what his hope had been. "You were so young when you became engaged to Forrest, is it not possible that you deceived yourself?" he asked. "If you were to think it all over, might you not find that you too were mistaken?"

"I have never thought so yet; and every day is so filled up with thinking and doing for other people, there is no time to change; and indeed, if this one little selfish happiness, the memory of the old happiness, were taken away, my life would be very hard and dreary," said Mary.

"But people change their god, Mary, more than once," persisted Cameron. "You were scarcely twenty, were you? There must be time to change. Tell me I may wait."

"People do not change their god till they have discovered something amiss in their present one. It is I who have been found

wanting, you know," she said, with such a sweet, modest simplicity, that Cameron desired more than ever to have the right to worship what the other had resigned.

He knew love was proof against argument, but he could not resist saying, "I don't think love ought to outlast faith in goodness; I mean such love as we are talking about. Our souls are too poor and dependent to assume the divine prerogatives."

Mary wished to explain that with her, love was not assuming to outlast faith. She had not changed, and had neither opportunity nor inclination to attempt to change. With imaginative natures, especially if there be the glow of enthusiasm, constancy is not a virtue, it is simply a consequence. These people love their own ideal, and invest their idol with untold graces: they may meet with small consideration in return; but what has reciprocity to do with this soul worship? Perhaps the grand disregard, the supreme indifference, has some part in the infatuation or reverence, as they would call their feeling. She understood it all for her own part, and was satisfied to keep to her allegiance. Mr.

Cameron might think her foolish, but if he would understand her, he too might be satisfied.

"Every one cannot be happy," she said, "but we can get used to anything, except having to think evil of our friends; and just because a man is made by circumstances to change his intentions, there can be no need for thinking evil of him."

Mr. Cameron had called Mr. Forrest a scoundrel and a sneak many times, and he could scarcely now restrain these opprobrious epithets.

Seeing the angry look, Mary began the explanation, that seemed imperative. "Do you remember the happy evenings we used to spend when Susan was alive, and we were all young people?" she asked.

"No, I never was young," he interrupted, not caring for the retrospect.

Mary smiled sadly. "You would be young now if your sisters had lived; and I sometimes think Bernard would have been different. I have a fancy that Susan took his human heart away with her, and perhaps left him hers, which had communed with the

angels. You know how clever Susan was, so much before me, though I was the elder; and she and Bernard used to write little poems and songs, which you were proud of, and for which you composed musical accompaniments. There is one," she said, taking a piece of music from her folio. "We had been talking about inconstancy; and did not see vice in it, even then."

"I remember; Mr. Forrest was the hero," said Cameron sardonically.

She assented with a look.

"He had been jilting his cousin that time, I think, though perhaps that was no great matter."

She took no notice of this little stiletto touch, but remarked, as she glanced over the song, "I have proved to be the little wayside weed that has its place by the dusty, busy path of everyday life. It would be worse than useless in a gay garden, and I am content."

Her smile was rather sad, but gentle and patient enough, but his grotesque humour broke through. "I suppose, then, I am the monk's hood in the maid's garden. Shall I go?"

"Yes," she replied.

They both knew how much was implied : they must yield to the inevitable.

Mr. Cameron lifted his hat and was going away without another word, when he turned from the door suddenly, to see the pitiful look that was following him ; and though it was too pitiful to have any comfort for him, it induced him to say, " I have never changed, and never shall change ; and I can have patience if you will promise to let me know if you ever see any virtue in fidelity."

Mrs. Cameron kept a long, anxious watch that night, hoping her son might come to her, and fearing to meet him in his disappointment if he did, until she heard him leave his music-room and ascend the stairs. He passed her door, but she called him, and he came. Lifting her knitting, she worked nervously and with a trembling hand as she said, " I would depart to-morrow, and with a vast content, could I but see you and Mary Elton hand-in-hand. This may not seem to be saying much, considering how long I have been here and how many have gone before ; nevertheless, it is hard to go with this yearning for my one, lonely son. I know

what loneliness means; and it makes me more loath than is seemly to go my way, leaving thee, George Cameron, without a soul to look to when I am gone. Is it all over, then?"

George might have resented even such an address as this, and have refused the comfort that was meant, if he had not perceived the shadow the great future had already cast over his aged mother's form and face. That softened him, and he answered, gently enough, "Ay, mother."

"You have asked her, then, in so many words, to be thy wedded wife; and she has said thee nay?"

She had to speak in a louder tone than seemed consistent; and she looked shy and conscious, as if aware her question was scarcely a fitting one.

"As near as might be," he answered moodily.

"And are you satisfied?"

George thought the manner of this question implied a doubt of his sincerity or diplomacy in making love; and he responded ungraciously, "What would you have, mother?"



A man can't make a woman love him. Why, every one knows, the more he tries the farther he is from his aim."

"Is that really the case with Mary Elton? If you mean to tell me that she dislikes you, I will say no more about her; but I should never have supposed she was such a little goose."

"You need not suppose that," he replied shortly. "There are surely some degrees between disliking a man and loving him! And now what of the assizes to-morrow? shall you be able to go if I hire a coach? I think you must."

CHAPTER V.

A SINGER'S HOME.

THE new home, opened under Mrs. Bray's generalship, and in which Eve was so important a consideration, was externally one of the million—a single house, with two pretty good rooms in front and two or three dreary little ones at the back. The inmates of these houses usually choose the dreary back rooms for the ordinary purposes of life, keeping the one comfortable, up-stairs room for show, or no purpose at all. This house, being situated in the locality known in London as rather unsubstantial, had perhaps a purpose to answer in submitting much to appearances; for there the professors of the fine arts chiefly congregate, and, having to grind their souls to make their bread, a good exterior has its price. As Eve had been

brought up in a similar home, she had no disenchantments to pass through, no refined sentiments to be outraged, as she saw how men will trifle with their grand talents : here, a lazy Epicurean wrapping his sublime gift in the napkin of his sensualism ; and, again, a niggard, throwing his in with the lot of the most sordid of money-makers. She had not to learn now for the first time how the world can fall into raptures over a sublime work, and applaud or crown its favourites in an auspicious moment, and then go on with the most luxurious of destinies, heedless whether its idol has even a niche in which to rest. But she saw these things with another light thrown upon them, and was not so indifferent to genius, with its delicate, high, or tragic powers, as she might have remained had she never known George Cameron or the Serles.

Eve was not too well satisfied with the change ; and if she had known that Mrs. Bray was to be of the household, she would have tried to have reduced Mr. Serle to a less demonstrative item, and have remained in his more congenial home. Having taken herself off in a saucy humour, and thinking it would

be nice to be mistress of her mother and herself, she was not at liberty at present to retract. He had procured a good engagement for her, and took care that she should do pretty well if she tried; and she did try; still, however, fully believing all the flattering things he had said, and fancying that he could not live for long without his pretty, piquante little queen. He would certainly come for her some day, and she would as certainly make binding stipulations and go back to Dinorah. The petting and caressing she received from her mother, who was so thankful to have her as her very own, and from Mrs. Bray, who knew her value, were not all in all. Much as she had been neglected and trifled with, something in her turned naturally towards the light; and, for any thing she knew to the contrary, the Serles, though very odd, were refined and honest; and she never had to meet such questionable people as those, who did not appear to have much regard for a *congé* now. There was no lack of admiration; but she did not care for it: perhaps she was fastidious, knowing full well that she was worthy of admiration. The



æsthetic old master and the brilliant new one had spoiled her for this, which she contemptuously called "barrel-organ" homage. There was opportunity for lassitude and dullness. It was heavy work to have to practise and dress with no more appreciative company than those two insipid and easily-pleased women; and she was beginning to wonder what was the meaning of that aching, longing void that was usurping the place she used to think her own heart filled, when Will Fletcher joined the little family.

Will very soon became almost as considerable a personage as was the young breadwinner herself. He had always been a favourite with his aunt, and had made the old farm-house much more cheerful to her than the captain had been able to do; and Mrs. Bray took kindly to him. She liked the idea of a man being about, she said, it made them feel more respectable; while to Eve he was a very useful antidote against *ennui*. He had been the bearer of the uncomfortable tidings concerning Captain Jones' difficulties — tidings not altogether out of human probabilities, and therefore not too

desolating. So a place seemed to be ready-made for him; and, though it was a novel one, he adapted himself pretty well to that fag-end existence which must belong to the one male exponent of a feminine administration.

This lawless young fellow, whose tendencies were not vicious by any means, but whose character and position were worse than questionable from sheer inability to fit into the space to which he had somehow got appointed, would certainly not have adapted himself to this narrow sphere if he had not been spell-bound. The gay, garish nights spent at theatres and opera-houses, amongst bright, laughter-loving or sentimental people, with his gifted cousin as his own special property and charge, compensated for the tiresome days spent in the narrow city house, and filled up with a most heterogeneous medley of occupation, which his patronesses called business. The magnetic power under which he now lived, as if out of himself, had drawn him in some mysterious way from his freedom and obscurity, to this great city wilderness under its own despotic influence,

and bound him so completely that he had no longer any separate existence or responsibility concerning himself. For some time it was enough for him to be; but love has certain tendencies so demonstrative and petulant it will precipitate events, though they may prove all wrong and self-destroying.

Though Eve was neither unsophisticated nor dull, she took no notice of these world-old signs that have a new manifestation for every soul, and yet never mislead. She behaved just as she had always done towards Will, except that her ways were more refined and womanly. She teased him when she was tired of everything else, advised when her mood was moralizing, and petted him like an elder sister when it was affectionate; but she was always easy, attainable, and charming, and yet so far away.

They were coming home together in a cab after a concert. Will generally took his seat humbly with the driver; but it rained, and Eve had told him he need not get wet through unless he liked. It was always a struggle to the lad, with his simple, country experience, to get the young singer clear from the crowd,

and he armed his smooth, rosy countenance with grotesque terrors, which had any effect but the one intended. He got laughed at and derided ; but he triumphed, carrying off his charge from the ring of officious, self-appointed cavaliers—it must be granted, with the connivance of the discreet, maidenly Eve herself, whose ideas of what was due to a *prima donna* did not accord with the irregular attentions of gentlemen of the side-door habits.

Will threw himself back with a demonstrative sigh, and then said, with the fervour of experience, “ I used to think I should like to be a knight, to have nothing to do but ride about and deliver beautiful and distressed damsels ; but, by Jove, it’s hard work ! ”

Eve laughed merrily. “ You don’t answer to my idea of a knight,” she said. “ That look of angry desperation you put on when any one speaks to me does not agree with your face ; you will have to grow gaunt and grim.”

“ That will come soon enough. You cannot spare me a corner of a looking-glass ; but I know how thin I am getting, and I feel my

eyes are becoming hollow and frightfully anxious-looking. But, Eve, you are astounding! What wonderful things girls are! Such a little time ago, you had only one short, old frock, and long arms and thin neck, and straggling hair, and eyes—well, they were always beautiful, to be sure, but they had nothing of this light in them—that is not like anything else on earth, or in heaven, for that matter.”

“Why, Will, you are getting as bad as Mr. Serle! I shall have to put you out of the cab,” said Eve.

“I knew you long before Mr. Serle did; and, you know, if it had not been for that dress I got for you, he would never have taken any notice of you.”

Long ago Eve had become ashamed of the way in which that dress had become hers; and she had supposed that Will must have the same feeling about it. On the contrary, he was seeming rather proud of his part in the affair. It was time he was put right, so she said, “Many and many a time I have wished I had never had that dress. Every time I think of it my cheeks burn, and Miss Elton

comes before my eyes. What must she think of me? for of course she would recognize it!"

Her cousin was silent for a few minutes, then he said, "It was the cause of all my misfortunes, you know; but I never was ashamed before, because it was for you. To be sure, it was not pleasant to be found out; and when old Elton called me a rogue and dismissed me, I felt as bad as any fellow could do. I declared I would pay him off for that, and I did; but that ended badly enough, and drove me mad. Yes, it was the ruin of Elton and poor Groves and me; so it is only right and just that somebody should profit by it."

"It is no good thinking of these things," said Eve pensively; "that is, if you don't mean to mend them."

"How could I mend them? I could not bring Groves to life again; and Mr. Elton ought to have understood the laws of nature better. It was a judgment on him."

"Sometimes I have thought it would have been better to have told Mr. Cameron all," said Eve.

"Why, that would have exposed you, child.

You always said they would turn you out of doors if they knew."

"Yes, I could not have borne it then; but now I often think it is better to let things alone. I mean not to go wrong for the sake of getting on fast. We might have been just as forward," Eve said. Her mind, quick to apprehend, had dwelt much on their youthful error; and though she said it was for no good, the unpleasant reflection had been a strong impulse, and probably a restraining power too.

"It may be so with girls," Will replied. "They seem to come out, like flowers, of their own accord and without any trouble."

There was a pause for a short time. These two young things, pushed into a tempting world, and left to make out all the great problems that insist upon being made out, and that seem all the more urgent even while there is but little wisdom and much passion, were likely to get bewildered. Neither intended to go wrong; but if the right were found and followed, it must be after a painful experience, through many by-paths.

"I say, Eve," Will added more brightly,

"I sometimes think you will turn out a great person; not through your singing, you know, because that is certain; but a real, born lady."

"Very likely," said Eve quietly; "but why?"

"Well, I don't think you are like one of us. Perhaps Aunt Sophy had you given to her by somebody. They do that sort of thing in London."

"I should not wonder," Eve remarked, with perfect simplicity. There had not been much in her home-life for her heart to cling to; and there is enough that is wonderful and grandly exciting in life, to make a youthful spirit in readiness for any romantic development. "Still, I believe mamma is my own mother; but——" Eve paused.

"Well?"

"There is one thing we never talk about; and it seems so unnatural. I have never mentioned it to you."

"I expect there are a great many things you have never mentioned to me. Do you mean a lover?" Will asked, his heart beating very fast.



"Don't speak of lovers, pray; I detest them! I mean my father. I never heard of him. I used to try to make mamma talk of him when I was a little girl, but she was always so strange and disagreeable, I gave it up. Only I hate myself when I think of it."

"He might have died," said Will. "I am sure you need not hate yourself."

"People rather like talking about their dead husbands. Mrs. Poole used to run on about her 'dear Poole' while she was shuffling her cards; and even Mrs. Cameron did not seem to mind much. Did you never hear Uncle Dan speak of him?"

"Never; but this counts one to what I have just said. You may not belong to Aunt Sophy; and some grand person may want you when it is known how clever and handsome you are. However, I suppose it will never signify much to me."

"I should not go to any one, most likely. I have made up my mind what to do, on certain conditions," said Eve.

"I am such a miserably unfortunate young fellow!" Will exclaimed, in a tone as de-

sponding as were his words. "No one can ever care for a scampish thing like me. I am always getting between the two chairs and coming to the ground."

"You need not be either miserable or unfortunate any longer; no one need if they have a proper spirit. I used to think every thing went against me; but I thought a great deal, and tried to make out what was to be done, and then did it; and see what it has come to," said Eve, with very pardonable self-complacency.

"Dear, beautiful Eve!" Will exclaimed, too suddenly and transcendently happy to say any more. He was lifted all at once from the dismal swamp of despairing love and set on the sunny, flowery hill of hope; for he had but one desire, one idea left about life and happiness, and Eve was telling him that only spirit was wanting to attain whatever the life needed. It should never be that he must fail through a deficiency of spirit.

His elation was but momentary, for Eve continued, in blissful ignorance of his presumption, "I have a capital scheme in my head for you. I will ask Mr. Serle to make

you his valet. I am sure he will take you if I ask him, and if you will be attentive to his little whims; and it is such a nice, comfortable place! It will be much better than hanging on to mamma and Mrs. Bray."

Eve could not see the effect of her proposal on poor Will, who was more completely crushed than he had ever been in all his suppressed existence. Eve was prosperous and happy, and certainly deserved to be so; but she need not insult her less fortunate companion, he thought; and his spirit rose, overpowering his discretion.

"I did not know that I was hanging on any body. It certainly seemed to me that I must be of some use, sent about all day all over London, as I am, by a set of women, and worried to death at night by a set of lounging fellows who can do nothing but open their mouths. To tell you the truth, Madam Eve, I have plenty of money to keep myself," he said, angrily.

Eve was startled; not by Will's anger, but by the thought that if he had money it could not have been fairly obtained; and she knew how loosely he and principle were

attached to each other. The fact that her own principles had gone through some modifications made her suspiciously clear-sighted. She must find out what he meant; he was never very difficult to manage under her hand.

"How you have altered!" she said, as indifferently as possible. "You used to be so trusting and pleasant; even when you were in disgrace no one could say you were churlish; and now you not only grudge giving me your help, but actually suspect us of thinking much of your keep! Just as if artists, musicians especially, were not ready to share their best always with their friends!"

"I don't see why you should be advising me to go into service," he said. "I should have thought if I had been any help to you I might have been left to give it in peace. You know I hate the Serles."

"Hate the Serles! why what harm have they done you?"

"They took you from Framborough; and I did not think the town worth stopping in, and so went to live with Captain Jones; and he got me into worse trouble than ever."

"Well, I think if I were a grown-up man I should not talk about anybody getting me into trouble, nor let them do it either. It seems to me much more honourable to make out your own way, and to keep to it, than to have whiskers even," said Eve. "But tell me how Captain Jones got you into trouble, Will. Surely you are safe enough?"

"I don't know that. It is not easy for a young fellow to take care of himself if men and girls, and even horses, go dead against him," Will replied, so much mollified by Eve's interest in him, and recognition of his whiskers, as to be ready to resume his old state of confidingness.

"Don't go off into absurdities now; we shall be at home directly, and I shall never sleep under all this mystery. They can bring nothing against you, can they?"

Her tone was too gentle to be resisted; and Will told her that he had a purse of money in his possession, at least he knew where it was concealed, and he had strong suspicions that it was money that would bring trouble.

"I told you all about the arrest of the

captain, you know," he added, "but I never told any one, except Kitty, that I found a purse with a great deal of money in it, in a secret pocket in the saddle of his wonderful black horse."

"Are you sure, or only making it out as you go on?" Eve asked, doubtingly; this story seeming more like a romance of his own creating than a matter of fact, used as she was to the unreal.

"I tell you Kitty knows all about it; and no one gammons her. It's true."

"Of course you will give it back to the captain when he is acquitted? It is nothing to you," Eve exclaimed, not believing yet in the guilt of her mother's husband.

"Is a fellow always to be thought meanly of, because he once made off with a flimsy gown?" Will asked, indignantly. "Have I not told you I left it with Kitty on purpose that it might be safe?"

"No, you did not tell me that, but I am glad; only it must be uncomfortable for Kitty. As mamma is Captain Jones's wife, I think she might be told about it."

"Oh, if you tell Aunt Sophy there will be

no peace till Mrs. Bray gets hold of it; and then what will the captain say to me? But wait till you hear the rest. There is no end of talk at Framborough about that purse; and the squire at Wyckam is in trouble over it. They say he knows where it is and will have to produce it. The towns people talked about it before I left; and I had a letter two days ago that says it will be the ruin of him."

"Mr. Forrest!" Eve exclaimed. "What on earth has he to do with Captain Jones or his money?"

"Whys and wherefores are not of much consequence when a thing is," said Will sententiously. "The question is, what had we better do with the money? Kitty will be frightened if she hears this report; may be she will send it the purse Mr. Forrest."

"We had better tell mamma; she may not know any better than we do what to do, but it is more her concern than ours."

"I never thought Aunt Sophy particularly sharp," said Will, with more ingenuousness than gallantry.

"Perhaps not; but when people have

husbands I fancy they have more right to their affairs than any other people; and mamma can keep a secret, for nobody knows who her first husband was." Before Eve could balance her argument the coach stopped at their door.

There was something in Mr. Forrest that had always a strange fascination for Eve. She was not conscious of anything like affection, and there was certainly no fear in her heart, for him; yet if she saw him walk down the Castle Street at Framborough, she watched him as long as he was in sight with singular interest; and when she heard his voice at Mrs. Cameron's, an unaccountable thrill agitated every nerve, and she could never rest till she had found some excuse for going into the parlour, or refrain from glancing into his face, when the attraction would be as mysteriously suspended, for she was never able to meet his eye or address him on any pretence. Now that she was so far off it seemed as if the sound of his name affected her beyond any precedent, and the knowledge that he was in trouble moved her most painfully.

As she passed the parlour door on her way from the coach to her room she announced, in her usual imperious style, that she was going to be busy and should not come down to supper; and then, before her finery was removed, she sat down to think. However intense this process might be, it never was a lengthened one; her thoughts seemed to dance into order; and whether or not the result were wise, it approved itself to her judgment and was acted upon without misgiving.

“It is no good to tell mamma; she will only look perplexed and wish she knew what to do, and ask me to tell her, and then not do it. I have always managed my own affairs pretty well, and do not see any particular difficulty in this. If Mr. Forrest is required to produce this money, of course he ought to know where it is.” This was the substance of her cogitation; and as the result, she opened her little business desk and wrote as plainly as she could. Her handwriting was sprawling and not very legible, but her expression was concise and clear. Her note was to the following effect:—

“I know all about that purse of money the people are so stupid as to say you have hidden. If you go to Box Court and ask Kitty Fletcher, she will give it you if you say such is her brother’s desire: but do not betray Will.”

After a moment’s reflection she decided upon subscribing her own name; not that it could be of any consequence, but her dealings with the world had taught her that anonymous letters were not heeded, so she signed it “Eve”—and then fell to pondering what surname she had to add; but that difficulty could not be met.

Thus it was that Mr. Forrest obtained his inconvenient knowledge. This little note, with its queer, misshapen characters, its genuine, if erring, desire to help him, and its simple signature, moved him even more powerfully than the heinous idea which had gone abroad, concerning his relation with the adventurous Captain Jones; but what to do with this knowledge, how to act with regard to this strangely irrepressible purse, he could not decide. It could not be ignored; Eve’s signature was corroborative enough. He

could no longer doubt that Jones had stolen it; though how he had transferred it so quickly from his own person, and how it had got to the Fletchers, he could only divine by supposing Will was an accomplice and entrusted with the spoil. Two or three days were spent in a wretched state of uncertainty about it; and in the meantime Mr. Cameron made his visit and urgent appeal, necessarily in vain; because Frederick Forrest had so complicated his affairs that he could only sink into deeper pitfalls by every attempt at self-extrication.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVE OF SERLE'S OPERA.

TWO days afterwards Eve received a reply to her note. She, the lonely, self-dependent Eve, as, from long habit, she still regarded herself, seemed to be a person of consideration to the much revered and important Mr. Forrest of Wyckam Hall, for she was actually addressed by his own hand, and in an earnest, appealing tone.

If she could give him any information about the money supposed to be stolen from Captain Jones, or through him from any other person, she was to do so immediately, and without keeping back the slightest incident. Especially she was to tell him how it had fallen into the hands of the Fletchers, and how the facts had become known to her. Mr. Forrest had added a very surprising and



friendly postscript, stating that so much depended upon a full and true narration, that if Eve were unable to write all she knew she had better come to Framborough for a few days, when she could tell him personally, or tell Mr. Cameron, if she preferred giving her confidence to him.

When this letter was put into Eve's hand she was anxiously preparing to go to the rehearsal of a new opera of San Serle's, and this business letter, strange and earnest as it was, did not of course appear half so important as her own professional engagement. The Serles had got this opera upon the stage with infinite trouble. It was the first time a manager had consented to forego prestige, and the verdict of the old schools, and risk so much for such a decided innovation; and even the Serles' influence, high as it was, might not have succeeded, had not Eve's talent and her rare grace been so assured. San Serle had trained, made her indeed, in her plastic youth and beauty, ever since she had been with him, for this one purpose; and this was the secret of his sudden fancy for and determination to possess her. Glück being his ideal, the musical world

was in a state of barbarian ignorance and miserable privation till his manifestation should come; and, meanwhile, Mr. Serle could not consider himself an unworthy herald of the new age that must dawn on the musical world.

Serle considered that Eve, a child of the people, a soul impregnated with the strong sentiments and sympathies of the broadest humanity, tempered with high culture and subdued passion—for he had discovered the ruling passion, bound and put out of the way as it was—could give life, and therefore success, to the peculiar, mixed character of the heroine.

Eve had seconded his wish with all her mind; for though she was aware of Mr. Cameron's dislike of Glück's works, and absolute intolerance of this disciple, she ascribed it to his classic prejudices; and she loved a broader and more mingled life, a purpose for music that should embody and express a fuller humanity for all. When Mr. Serle had penetrated her with Glück's music and made his theories well known, and then told her, of the part expressly composed for her transla-

tion—that he believed his fame, as an original and regenerating artist, depended much upon her—she had been overpowered, as with a wondrous mission, and had wept like a youthful enthusiast over her mysterious and glorious calling. How, then, was she to miss a single rehearsal, or spare any thought, for the vague and distant perplexities of a Mr. Forrest just now?

Will Fletcher was waiting to attend her to the theatre. She was seated before her desk scribbling a hasty note to get the intrusion off her mind, arrayed with a weird splendour in keeping with the character she had already assumed; for Eve had studied very hard and closely, and with her to assume a character was to live it for the time.

“Look here, Will!” she exclaimed, showing him the note she had just written. “This might have been an awkward little affair for you, if I had let it be. I just wrote to tell Mr. Forrest what you had told me about the purse of money—that is to say, I mentioned that a purse of gold was in your house at Box Court, or wherever Kitty lives now; and this is Mr. Forrest’s peculiar notice of

the news, and this my purposed reply to him :—

“ If Mr. Forrest wishes to learn more about the money, Kitty Fletcher will tell him all that is right and proper, especially if he is going to restore it to the rightful owner. Eve has quite too much to do for the public, and cannot attend to little matters just now. Kitty lives at number four, Abbey Court. Mr. Forrest must give Will’s love and say it is he who wishes this to be done.”

“ Eve, what a thundering——” Will pressed forward to protest vigorously against this perversion of his wishes, when Eve checked him.

“ Don’t spoil my grand robe, Will. Mr. Serle told me to rehearse in my state dress or I should fail to wear it unconsciously. And don’t use those tremendous adjectives on every little affair, or what will you do when anything really important, like my marriage, for instance, occurs ?”

“ Your marriage, Eve ! Why nothing will signify at all when that happens. The adjectives may all be blest for what I shall want with them then,” said Will, his indignation

suddenly diverted, as Eve meant it to be. "But however did you make such a mistake? I shall be taken up as an accomplice; and I really am as innocent as a child."

"And what do you suppose they could do to you, if you were taken up, except prove you innocent? I don't believe you will ever be a man till you have gone through something very dreadful—a real trial before judge and jury, or perhaps even a short imprisonment, if it is only to teach you what you are made of. Of course I don't want you to be transported or made a felon of, or even to have your hair all shorn off, because I don't think you would stand up against that; but some people are like Mrs. Cameron's old watch, they require a good shaking to make them go right, and you must be one of them."

"And I should never find out that you were anything but a most stony-hearted girl, if I could not see your eyes when you are talking. They always make me just ready to serve you like a slave. So I suppose I may as well post your letter and take the consequences."

"There won't be any consequences to you.

Kitty will take care of that, you may be sure."

"I am anything but sure of Kitty though," Will objected, though he took the note implicitly. "She was always a queer one to deal with, making more account of what she calls principle than people."

"For shame, Will! who was it that consented to take charge of this very purse, and helped you to get off clear in the middle of the night, and even sent you to my own house?" cried Eve. "Now don't you see that you are hindering and vexing me very much, and Mr. Serle will be desolated in consequence? To satisfy you, however, I will add a little postscript," she said, with the sudden transition that was characteristic of her, and looking preternaturally wise as she re-opened the note and added, rapidly,—

"Will Fletcher is willing to appear in court as a witness in the trial of Captain Jones—and he found the purse—if you will promise that he may disappear as soon as his evidence is given."

"Now, you cowardly boy, if you are a witness your person will be sacred, and you

may save Mr. Forrest an immense amount of trouble. Don't give me any more, but post this instantly, and then come with me to the theatre. I don't know any one else I would give so much time to just at this critical hour."

"Ay, that's because you are working for Mr. Serle. I cannot leave London till this concert is over, for I must see you in your great *rôle*, you know. I expect it will be very bad for me, for of course Mr. Serle is to be your lover. He wouldn't be so anxious about it if any one else were to be singing and grimacing at you."

Will persisted in finishing his cutting speech in spite of Eve's frowns and signs that he should depart instantly. After thus delivering himself he took the note, leaving his young mistress to an hour's hard study of her difficult and critical music.

Bernard Fielding was staying with the Serles during these rehearsals, and was not to return to Framborough until after the grand performance, Mr. Serle having given him the elucidation of his second character, the Hebrew, Kelita, who had married the rare

Egyptian, his *prima donna*. Eve had not chosen to enlighten Will Fletcher as to this fact; perhaps even she would have not been able to explain why. Some little self-conscious involvements had been at work and made her feel shy about it before her jealously-disposed cousin.

The evening before the new opera was introduced, a small party of the initiated met at the Serles' house, all choice spirits, as San called those who accorded with his special ideas and fancies. The principal singers were there, and at least one devoted critic. A composer of some eminence, adverse to this new idea which was moving the lovers of music, was also amongst the guests; because Dinorah had the sense to know that an opposition could suggest the most useful hints sometimes, and that a word of wisdom, though it might come from an enemy, might open a new channel for a success; while the fervours of enthusiastic admirers and friends would probably make the atmosphere hazy, and impervious to improvement. This gentleman proved very useful in keeping up a lively discussion on

the several scenes, and San Serle's equable temper was put to some severe tests, generally bravely met by his exquisite talent and fine executive skill. Serle was, indeed, an expositor of a modern poet's dictum—" 'tis we musicians who know."

Once, on Eve's account, he was seriously troubled. They were trying over, for the last time, the scene which all admitted would be a crucial one—a scene in which a youthful and loving wedded pair must relinquish each other by the command of a priestly authority, recognized only by the husband. How was Eve to render this part, to be true to a faithful and pure woman's conscience, and yet to interpret the author's great idea that the perfection of humanity, as a whole, needs the virtues of every individual in full exercise, and cannot thrive on the stunted submission of any of the soul's attributes at the word of a privileged hierarch? The adverse critics of this ambitious school had made the most of this difficulty. Mr. Cameron's æsthetic soul had delivered itself to Bernard more than once. He was sure Mr. Serle could never make

anything of a matrimonial dilemma but confusion worse confounded; and no living woman could be otherwise than selfish, conventionally egotistical in her conjugal affairs. He was supported by Dinorah's guest.

"Your Eve must be commonplace in such a situation, Mr. Serle," he said, glancing at the proud young girl superciliously.

"I am quite satisfied with what Eve has done," Serle replied, carelessly. "She is simply grand, sir; ready to see the truth through her husband's medium. You are aware she has become national already through her sympathy with the Hebrew."

"If that is your idea of feminine greatness, I don't wonder so much at your musical vagaries!" This very natural reflection was endorsed by an emphatic shrug of the critical shoulders.

The cool way in which she was being discussed, as if her individuality were already lost, amused Eve for awhile; but when Bernard, entering into the conversation warmly, repeated some expression of Mr. Cameron's concerning this passage, in which he declared his opinion that the opera would

fall or live by the natural or æsthetic rendering of this one scene, she felt frightened and doubtful of her powers.

Anxious as Mr. Serle had undoubtedly been about this part, he had left much to Eve's own genius in its interpretation, having more faith in a woman's intuitions where her affections are concerned than most men possess; he had, too, avoided laying any very particular stress upon its importance, lest he should intimidate and make the impressive girl painfully nervous. He saw the effect of his guest's words, and also of the sudden change that passed over Eve when Mr. Cameron was quoted; and, frowning at Bernard in a singular and ferocious manner, said, ironically, "Of course women are conventional under any stress of circumstances. They always elude our finer sympathies and put themselves under coarser relations thereby—swooning, and so deferring their suffering to some lonely and less convenient season; or sinking into supine stupors, and so becoming intensely uninteresting; or tearing their hair and screeching, and so eliding themselves altogether from our sphere."

Eve smiled, but rather irresolutely. "Are you sure we are right?" she asked, going quickly to his side. "You know if we defy the popular ideas we shall be no more successful than Mr. Cameron is. Will it not be better to be conventional?"

"Only be to-morrow night, before the royal public, what you were this morning before your own royal genius, and I shall be satisfied, though all the geese of the city hiss," said Serle.

The idea of being hissed, even though it might be by geese, had never entered Eve's head in all her life, and such a possibility made her change colour.

A thoughtfully ill-natured young person said, to his aspiring and pretty neighbour, "I should not wonder if our *prima donna* has stage-fright to-morrow night."

Though the terrible words were only whispered, they reached Eve's quick ears.

"What is stage-fright?" she asked.

"Come and help me fry my sprats, Evalina," said Serle; and, going into the little dining-room, he put on his gorgeous dressing-gown and cap, and, silver frying-

pan in hand, began to cook his favourite supper in his own style. The seductive smell and inviting simmering induced the guests to go also. As this dainty cook was in the habit of eating each delectable morsel at its culminating epoch, the proceedings did not seem likely to promise much edification to the by-standers; but after a few fishes had made him more observant, he became conscious that he was scarcely in a gracious relation to his guests.

"I really don't see how I can cook sprats for all these people," he said, turning upon the crowd with a troubled air, and holding a crisp sprat by the tail very near to his lips.

"Oh, we did not come to be fed, at least not especially," a fair singer replied, as if apologizing in a doubtful manner. The lady wore a diamond star over her brow, the gift of a royal admirer; and she was always a favoured guest. "It was the charming little domestic distraction we wanted, was it not?" she asked, looking into the serious face of another celebrity.

"Certainly not! I wanted sprats," he exclaimed, in a rich, high tone so much out

of accord with his words, Serle laughed, till his difficult situation became more urgently embarrassing.

“Dinny, how am I to feed all these people, and with these little fishes too? If we dish them up they are spoiled, their flavour is so subtle. I could put them into the ladies’ mouths, you know; but the gentlemen would feel the situation so acutely we should become self-conscious and absurd.”

Dinorah restored calm to his perplexed soul by announcing that supper was prepared in the drawing-room, and he was left to finish his sprats in peace.

CHAPTER VII.

EZRA.

THE lovers of music were moved by a profound enthusiasm when this new work, by the critical and imaginative Serle, was announced ; and the names of his principal performers were discussed with a freedom as relentless and varied as the degrees of human intelligence were high or otherwise. The name of the *prima donna* was especially inciting ; it was only Eve, both in her character as the alien wife of the singer of the Jewish temple and in her own proper person ; and although this simple name was already well known in musical circles, it was uttered with every possible change of expression, even by some before whom she would have bowed with reverence. San Serle had published his theories freely, so people were not surprised

that his list was filled with English names chiefly. If English men and women can sing—and what is to hinder them from competing with foreign professors?—the disguise of their nationality is a sin against their race, and must operate against their legitimate mission. It was expected, too, that this opera would be brought out with every advantage of scenery and investiture. Serle believed that nothing should be spared in preparing for the presentation of a new work. Why should not the various sections of art unite in making one perfect thing for the education and delight of the world? If the author were poor, surely each artist would rejoice in lending of his best treasures, proud to put his corner-stone in the glorious temple, where at least he would have a chance of being useful and permanent; and if there were already fame and wealth to spare, they could not be more gloriously applied than in showing forth a great and beautiful offspring of a cultivated soul.

When Mr. Serle handed over, with an air of gratified certainty, a roll of bank notes to a painter for the development of his rarest

scene, his sister smiled her approbation quite genuinely, for she was well convinced of the wisdom of the investment; but certain feminine misgivings following closely, she looked drolly pathetic as, reminding her free-hearted brother of his last promise, she whispered, "The pearly silk, San dear, that you said should stand by itself—I am afraid it will never stand by me."

San lifted her hand to his lips, with the courtesy he always evinced towards her, as he answered, "And if it never should, Dinorah can stand without it."

When the hour of initiation had arrived, it was evident the populace had caught some glimmerings of an unusual and popular idea, for they hung about the theatre in crowds, and Serle regretted he could not admit them all, that for once the vital power of art might have its free, fair way.

Mr. Forrest and Mr. Cameron had come by that day's coach from Framborough, and were already within the doors. Mr. Cameron had said many times that he did not care a straw for these theories, or for any exponent of this new-fangled school. Music was sacred

and immaculate, and would only suffer degradation by any marriage with anything, for everything must necessarily be of a lower type. He was there because he could vouch for this tom-foolery with a better grace when he had been a witness of it.

Mr. Forrest made no confessions; he had strong leadings of some kind, or he would not have been present, but he kept his purposes to himself.

There was a fine scene when the green curtain rose. A chain of mountains, with the clearly-defined outlines of an oriental atmosphere, bounded the distance; the temple of Jerusalem, exquisitely drawn, was recognized; and beside it stood a group of sacerdotal and princely magnates of the East. A priest in a white serge robe, with brodered hem of gold and scarlet and blue, occupied a central place by the steps of the temple. His attitude was intense and sorrow-stricken, for he was listening to the grievous story of the Hebrew princes, who sang of the wrong the Israelites had committed against their faith and nation by their numerous alliances with foreign countries. Their tone was low and

plaintive, but not wholly sorrowful, their manner being tinged with a certain triumph as they proceeded, as if they would fain be proud of the informer's mission. Pointing towards the glittering domes and minarets that rose on either hand, they indicated, with eager, trembling fingers, that the offenders were shamelessly polluting by their presence the Holy City ; and their voices rose as they concluded, indignantly,—

“ And the children that are growing up in the city of our fathers shall come to declare of their sacred lineage—shall come to minister in the temple of the Holy One—to be put to shame before the nations, because of the trespass of their fathers.”

The white-robed priest bowed before the evil tidings as if smitten with sorrow and shame ; and when the informers withdrew he was prostrate before the temple, with hidden face.

As a gleam of rosy light from the setting sun announced the hour of evening sacrifice, a boy came from the temple door bearing a gorgeous breastplate of precious stones engraved with many great and reverend names.

The priest put away the sacred symbol with gesture of dismay and grief, and, rising to his knees, he turned towards the audience and sang, with grand pathos and fervour, his confession and denunciation of the people's sin, beginning :—

“ I am ashamed, and I blush to lift up my face.

“ From the days of our fathers have we been wanderers, and in trouble, and in captivity, and in confusion of face.

“ And now for a little space, the Mighty, the Holy One hath given us a nail in His Holy place. He hath given us light and joy and grace. He hath given us to live in His Holy place.

“ But now, alas ! what shall we say ? We have fallen ! we have fallen in the nations' face ! like the morning star from his heavenly place—as in this day ! ”

How the friends of San Serle rejoiced in him as they saw and heard the broad human sympathy that glorified both form and voice ! He was wonderful ! so perfectly had the inner transfigured the outer man.

Some of the chiefs of the Hebrews coming up to the evening service and hearing their trespass thus set before them, and catching the fervour of their priest, fall in with the confession, and end by a terrible vow to put away their wives and little ones.

With his appreciation of the delicate nature of this arrangement, a cynical smile stole over Cameron's face, and he muttered, "Peculiar teaching rather for the masses. It may be grateful enough, if not too salutary."

While the penitent Hebrews were setting themselves to rights, a family group appeared to the right of the temple, seeming about the distance of an arrow's flight from its courts. This little isolated world of love and sorrow, telling much more than the general trouble could tell of the meaning of the sin and its expiation.

Kelita, one of the temple singers, was robing for the service; and Eve, the radiant Egyptian wife, was fastening about his neck the golden chains of the sacred vestment. As she looked into his face the passionate aspiration of her soul illumined her beautiful countenance. She was pleading with her husband that she might no longer be isolated from his faith and daily devotion, but be a witness of the glories and a sharer of the prerogatives she had learned, through him, to venerate supremely. Still, anxious that he should not think her unmindful of his love and care,

she chanted a charming recitative, with glowing smile and love-lighted eyes, the tone of her voice and manner changing, however, as the melody proceeded until the sympathetic listeners seemed all woe-begone :—

“ Love mingles light and joy with every thing, like sunshine in the valley of my youth. A very paradise my home is seeming ; ay, sweeter far than any primal Eve’s, for little ones are playing in our bowers ; and thou art more than Adam unto Eve—thou art my priest, beloved Kelita !

“ Then take me with thee to the temple shrine ;
My soul is all athirst for thy glad call :
Oh, bid me not be happy like the flowers—
Whisper no longer, ‘ Love is all in all ! ’
The lily’s cup that earthly dew has fill’d,
Ere now a cold, earth-blight has touch’d and kill’d.

“ Thou hast a holier love than aught of mine !
I feel its spirit breathing in thy kiss :
When may I sing before the temple shrine ?
Oh, bid me not sing, star-like in thy heavens !
The quivering stars burn with celestial light,
Or, drawn by earth’s base liens, sink in night.”

Kelita, replying with the accustomed kiss and look of tender yet calm superiority, inevitable in one so supreme, added,—

“ Thou art my Eve, beloved one, the sweet and holy music of my life !
Yet the temple brooks no stranger’s foot ; and art not thou an alien ? ”

“No alien, if thy wife;—
For all these years, O Kelita, love has been teaching
me,
That He who made thy soul for Him made my soul
for thee.”

As Kelita turned away, with his fine smile of gratified feeling, Eve sat down to sing her little ones their lullaby. From the low, soothing tones and sweet though heathenish words of her evening hymn, she rose by degrees to the enthusiasm and purity of a Hebrew psalm, till worship seemed to be her essential life, and song its means and development; her very form and face became transfused, the rare atmosphere of her pure, rich spirit was almost an evident glory. Her eldest child, with that ready feeling for holy, happy beauty so natural to childhood, threw his arms about her neck and kissed her brow, his reverent love evidently born of the moment. This sudden action changed the young mother's mood; she forgot herself, even the Divine subject of her worship faded from her soul, and she felt only that these children must never be taught to despise her, because of her nation and early faith, and feeling as truly that they would so be taught,

she met her husband on the threshold with the thrilling chant of her new fear :—

“The sons of the stranger who love the Lord, who join themselves to be His servants, to love and fear His name, even them will He bring to His holy mountain and make them joyful in His house of prayer.”

Kelita had returned in a strange mood. He answered her appeal by a defiant glance towards the sacred temple ; and then, with averted face, put his wife and children away from him, and sang the fateful words by which Ezra had decreed, that every Hebrew who had allied himself with a stranger should free himself at once from the shameful bond. There was some pathos, but more enthusiasm in the youthful Nethenim's rendering. The part of one who could sacrifice every personal and human passion for the remote and diviner obligation, was so native to Bernard Fielding he was sure to translate sublimely. As the devotee he was perfect ; but to his wife, incomprehensible or soul-destroying. She could not have recourse to one moment's incredulity or hope ; the Israelite's faith was too assured to leave her any chance of sweet delusion or fond prayer. She stood before

him passively listening, as he declared that his word had gone forth with the declaration of his people, that he would look upon her face no more, and that the voices of his children should never again make music in his house. There was one instant of pathetic passion in her gesture, one note of dignified acquiescence from her lips, and then Eve appeared lost to the *rôle* of the high-born but outraged wife. She looked round as if frightened, and then fixed a fascinated gaze upon Kelita's downcast face. Some idea quite apart from the legend was charming her, not as the Hebrew singer's wife, but as Eve the maiden. This high, priestlike devotion of the young man, this impossibility of any tender human love or earthly care, was real, and it was overwhelming. It bore in upon her soul a new and unlooked-for agony. Which Eve was she? the despised, abandoned wife or the equally unhappy and contemned though loving maiden? No matter which, both characters were fearfully real, for many women suffered thus, and Eve in all.

Finding there was some unexpected lapse, Bernard raised his eyes and saw the un-

wonted light of fear or some strange shock in hers ; and then, the legend and the wondering crowd all forgotten, or so vividly realized by her quickened spirit as to be her actual life, new creations of her genius, Eve sang,—

“ Oh, false as fair ! false, yet divinely fair !
Sing on with heart of stone before the throne—
No tender human love, no worship will be there ;
For souls are human here, and deep and true,
Loving as God loves every thing that is,
Or worse than nothing, self-fill'd things for scorn.
Oh Heaven, why were we born, to love and be of all
love lorn ?
Alas for the poor sisterhood of stricken wives !
Alas for hearts that love and fain must be
Silent and dark and deep as Memphian graves ! ”

While Bernard, in his amazement, was trying to invent some harmonious sentences to cover this dilemma, an assistant ran to San Serle with the tidings that his *prima donna* was going all wrong, and seemed to be quite beside herself. He was preparing to sit in judgment on these penitent Hebrew husbands who had fallen into his priestly mood so readily, but came forward instantly, and with wonderful aptitude applied himself to the office of wife-consoler, as if it were a part of his work and the proper thing to do.

This quickly restored Eve, and the opera proceeded triumphantly to the end.

Many of the people present never knew that any irrelevant interruption had occurred. A few perceived the lapse and attributed it to the panic that, sooner or later, overcomes most public performers; only two or three could have conceived of anything like the reality, or have felt such an influence as that which had overtaken poor Eve and bowed her high spirit so completely. It was sympathy, Mr. Cameron thought. "Eve realized her situation too intensely; it must be hard for young things to translate these high, tragic experiences. She has too much of the woman in her nature, after all my training, to succeed professionally. With all her fine genius, she will weep for her suffering sisters instead of sacrificing womanhood to grand, popular ideas."

Will Fletcher's firmament received another illumination from this episode. "So Madam Eve is in love with Mr. Bernard! I saw that in her eye. She could not bear his glorious, religious reasons when he ought to have been proposing the defiance that flashed

out for a moment and eloping with her and the young ones. I'm sure I would have left the priests and informers to make the most they could of the stony-hearted ones." That was Will's interpretation, and it dazzled and pained him for many a long and weary day.

What Mr. Serle really thought he never said to any one ; and Eve, though filled with shame and regret, would give no sign of explanation.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ABBEY COURT.

THOSE friendly visits of the Camerons to Wyckam Hall had not been without their effect upon the ill-bestead Forrest. Though he had certainly never quite made up his mind to suppress that piece of information Eve had given him concerning the stolen money, there is no knowing to what extremes a proud, tempted man may go when goaded by an adverse society and a morbid self-appreciation. Now, however, that he had admitted his knowledge to George Cameron he could not go back from his word; and since some confidence had been opened he was more disposed to consult with him as to possible evil chances befalling him.

On their way home from town, Cameron had again advised that Daniel Fletcher should

be silenced; and he repeated urgently: "If the fellow will not be quiet, I would have him arrested for conspiracy. But you must make haste about it; the assizes come on next week, you know."

"I am not likely to forget that," Forrest rejoined, with a painful attempt at a smile. "Still, I cannot threaten a man who has, as real a grievance against me, as Fletcher has. He may be carrying his vindictiveness to ridiculous lengths, but the facts are on his side, and he would have the public too. I should be condemned before I could raise my voice."

Seated quietly at home, with all the memorials of his fair past about him, and thinking over the probable perils that beset his honour as a gentleman, things looked so bad he could not suffer them to run their course without some opposing effort. Never to pass through that fine old portico again would be evil sufficient; but to have the stigma of felon attached to his name would be to close up, even to his own consciousness, all the good and happy prestiges of the past and the still nobler hopes of the future.

It was Saturday night, and Dan Fletcher would be at the market making his week's purchases. Mr. Forrest thought the opportunity might be used; he could have a few words with Kitty first, perhaps get the evidence in his own hand, and wait for Dan to return or not as he might choose. Eve's letter had given him the clue to the Fletcher's present abode, which was in a small grassy enclosure, formerly the court-yard of an abbey now in ruins, and about a mile from Framborough. It was a very pleasant and romantic spot, the woods of the abbey had not fallen with its walls, and enough of these were standing to form a picturesque shelter for the inhabitants of the court. There were only four dwellings, and one old stone door-way was the general entrance. How Daniel had been so fortunate as to get one of these pretty cottages was a secret he kept to himself. Kitty thought it would be even worth her while to get well again, now that life had such a free and pleasant look with it; and the little community had received her so kindly, privation and lonely longings, at any rate, had come to an end.

When Mr. Forrest opened the door he

came upon two people who were sitting on a fragment of the old wall in the light of the evening sun. The green quadrangle was in a golden glow, and the pair looked glorified; the man indeed must have felt so, for he called out, rather rapturously, "Come in! it's only me and Mary a-courting a bit." He came down from his elevation to point out the Fletcher's cottage, and then resumed his agreeable recreation.

Kitty, who was reclining on a curious little wooden couch by the window, did not seem surprised to see her visitor; and when the neighbour who was sitting by her, had curtsied and gone away, she said, immediately, "You have come about that money they say was stolen, haven't you, sir?"

"Yes; I have received this note from Eve—stay, can you read writing?" Mr. Forrest remarked Kitty's quick flush of pleasure as she recognized Eve's hand.

When she had read the note he said, "Now, you see, you may tell me all about the purse. How did it come to your hands?"

Kitty had become suddenly pale again, and looked very perplexed and doubtful as she replied, "She says I am to tell you

all that is right and proper, and that Will wishes this to be done—I wonder whether Will knows anything about it?”

“Why, you don’t suppose Eve would say that if it were not so! See, she says Will found the purse and will appear in court to say so!” Mr. Forrest exclaimed, as he indicated the postscript.

“I see that; but I should like to see Will himself first. Eve had a random way of saying things sometimes; and I know Will was very anxious no one should know where he found it, I think for Captain Jones’s sake,” Kitty persisted, though she felt very nervous in thus withstanding the gentleman’s wish.

“Is Will with Eve now, do you think?”

“He may be, sir. I do not know where else he can be.”

“Then what is more likely than that he should authorize her to say this?”

“Oh, sir, if she just took it into her head she would write it down, and even show it him and laugh at his fears. She can wind poor Will round her finger.”

“There’s no harm in Eve, is there, Kitty?” Mr. Forrest asked, with a sudden change in his manner, both of look and tone.

Kitty sighed. "I am very fond of my cousin, sir, though she is contrary sometimes. I never could get her to go to the Ebenezer, and, indeed, if she had gone, I don't know that it would have done much for her."

"Possibly not." Mr. Forrest could not restrain a smile as he thought of the fascinating singer of the opera-house, with her fine, highly-toned spirit, sitting by Kitty's side and calmly awaiting her mode of inspiration. Then he wondered if, with her easy play of conscience and not very veracious ideas, she might have been deluding him as well as Will, and so had made up this tale about the purse out of sheer wantonness. Putting the case to Kitty in this way he learned more from her than he otherwise might have done. She was beguiled to admit that her brother had brought the purse to her, leaving it in her charge lest he should be tempted to make illicit inroads into its contents.

"The money, then, is in your possession still?"

"No; father found it out and took it from me."

"But you know where it is? He has not

spent any of it, surely ?” Forrest exclaimed, a hope, half wild, half wicked, arising in his mind, that this intractable, relentless avenger might have been betrayed into dishonesty, and so have destroyed his evil cause.

Kitty had risen from her hard couch and was sitting with her back towards the window ; Mr. Forrest was facing it ; and as he raised his head from vainly waiting for an answer, he saw some one move quickly away. “ I suppose that is one of your young lovers impatient for my departure ? ” he said, rising and looking out. “ We don’t want any listeners—why, the lad has leaped over the wall into the wood ! Never mind him just now ; I have a serious proposal to make, which I hope you will agree to, Kitty,” he added, drawing his chair close to the couch and hesitating while she recovered from the perturbation excited by the probability, that it might have been Will himself who was thus furtively keeping watch over her. She had no lovers, and no one else was likely to be acting the spy in that friendly little court.

“ Perhaps you know why I am concerning myself about this purse of money ? ”

"Yes, sir ; I have heard say."

"Then you know why it is necessary that your brother should appear in court, to answer to his subpoena to bear witness to the finding of it ? Will you answer for his appearance ?"

"I think I see why ; but Will is such a foolish, timid boy, so terrified lest they should catch him and send him to jail, that he never dare act fair and above-ground. I am sure I cannot answer for him. Most likely I shall not see him at all." Kitty moved her head nervously towards the window as she spoke.

"Well, then, you can at least answer for yourself," Mr. Forrest persisted ; "you can promise me that you will attend, if I get a summons sent to you, and say all you know?"

Her thin white hands trembled. It seemed very dreadful to her to have to appear before a judge and jury at all, especially to have to swear to something, whatever scruples she might entertain. She was certain her father would be very angry ; and she might bring an unknown and crushing weight of woe

upon her brother; and yet it was so unlike her gentle, kindly nature to be thinking of any personal consequences when she might oblige another by a little sacrifice, she felt impelled to make a sort of compromise. Raising her languid eyes to Mr. Forrest's face, she said, "I will go if they will let me; but you know I am in a decline, sir, and have to mind what people tell me to do or leave alone; and I can't break my promise to Will."

"You shall not be exposed to any risks. A closed carriage shall come here for you, and I will see that you are provided with every comfort and are not fatigued."

She began to thank her considerate visitor for his great kindness on her behalf; but when he quickly assured her that she would be conferring a favour upon him if she would appear and just give the evidence she possessed, she felt extremely frightened, and, being convinced that her brother must suffer in proportion, tried to withdraw from any responsibility in the matter. Mr. Forrest, however, left her with the understanding that she had now no choice; either Will or

she herself must be a witness for or against Captain Jones, as the case might turn, and assuredly in his own favour whatever aspect affairs might take.

When he was gone Kitty sat for some time gazing abstractedly through the window and wondering how far she had committed herself. On one point she was quite clear. There could never come such a crisis in her life as a closed carriage and every comfort, for any earthly purpose without mischief ensuing. She was recalled to the realities of the present by the face of her own erratic brother at the window-pane. Will took a close survey of the room and then walked in.

She saw at a glance that he was in tribulation, though there was a decided change for the better in his general appearance, as if existence might have some purpose in it after all. He did not seem, however, to have become much more considerate, for, disregarding the flushed and anxious looks of poor Kitty, he exclaimed, abruptly, "What have you been telling Mr. Forrest? I know what he has been here for; he has had a

letter from Eve about that confounded money. Surely you have not told him where it is?"

"He knew we had it, for, as you say, he has heard from Eve," Kitty replied evasively. She was unwilling to confess that it had left her hand.

"But you have not given it up?"

"No, not to him. What does it matter to you, Will, who has it so long as you are clear?"

"You may give it up now, Kitty. I am going to leave the country. I am perfectly sick of my life in England, town or country, and I shall go to America and begin everything afresh. I shall go to the backwoods, where I hope there are no things like girls. But of course I shall want some money, so hand it out before the governor comes and catches us."

Kitty looked appalled, for there was no doubt of the young fellow's earnestness. "Why, Will, I thought going to London was to be the making of you!—and you were really never bad till now," she said, with some pity and much sorrow.

"So it would have been the very thing for

me if it were not for other people. But I'm nothing with Madam Eve now, and I'm sure there's nothing without her; so what I am is of very little consequence to anybody. Besides, that money doesn't belong to any one. Stolen money is always forfeited to the state, you know; and I am going to use it for the purchase of government land, so it is all right enough. Now fetch it, there's a good girl."

Very probably Will Fletcher believed something of his peculiar argument; people can deceive themselves very successfully when they mean to do so. Kitty did not care to investigate the legality of his statement; she only comprehended that the money was not theirs, and never could be used by them for any purpose, and so she told him. Still, she sympathized with his evident misery, and called Eve a proud, misleading girl, who ought to know better.

"Oh, Kitty, if you could only hear her and see her on the stage you would wonder at nothing!" groaned Will. "It is like finding fault with your angels, for not coming down from heaven to do for poor folks, to

blame Eve for not being ready to take up with me. I never did expect it, you know; but the night before last I saw, and began to understand a little, what a great difference there is between people. It is not only beauty that glorifies them, though of course she is beautiful—oh, I wonder why there is such a difference? She looks as if she knew everything when she is singing, and she makes me feel like the dust of the earth!”

“Yes, but that’s nonsense, you know,” Kitty replied, with sisterly discrimination. “One need not feel bad because somebody else is clever.”

“I’ve been a-wandering about in that wood for hours, wondering what to do with myself,” Will resumed, after a melancholy pause. “There seems nothing for me but to go to the backwoods, and of course I can’t go without money. I don’t see that I am to blame, because there’s only one way of getting out of a wretched muddle. Why, even your meeting-folks call life a waste, howling wilderness!”

“I am very sorry for you——” Kitty began, but Will interrupted her sympathy. Bad as

things were going with him, he was too youthful and light-minded to be permanently cast down.

"Oh, never you mind, and don't you be fretting yourself about me! I shall do very well out there. There is a good deal of money in that purse, and you might as well go with me, for what care father takes of you. Why, how thin and weak he is letting you get, Kitty!" he exclaimed, with real concern, now that the interest in himself was diverted by his sister's fragile appearance.

A month or two ago Kitty would have answered by saying she was going to heaven; latterly she had learned to express herself more in accordance with the meekness of her character, so she simply asked, "Did you not know I was in a decline, Will?"

"I knew people said so; but you'll soon be out of it again if you get into a good, stirring, healthy way of living. We will go away together; I can settle it with father. I must have the money, though, in my own hands first. Don't be afraid! You were always a frightened, silly little Kit, you know." Will neither looked nor spoke with a comfortable

decision. He was quite aware he could not claim this money, and was equally certain about his sister's views concerning it; so he could only make feeble requests for its possession. "Fetch it me now, there's a good, kind old Kitty!"

The poor girl felt for her misguided brother. It really did seem as if life had been a mistake, and he a hardly-used boy. For a moment the idea of beginning a new, strong, free existence together had a wondrous charm; but she knew it could never be realized. She must give him the facts. First, she told him that she was a doomed girl, even Miss Elton, who knew everything and was the last to say anything hard, thought her days would be very few; then, nobody ever prospered on ill-gotten gold; and lastly, that her father had found the purse during one of her more severe attacks of illness, and had declared that he would make the best use of it by making a proud man humble.

"It is Mr. Forrest he means, then," said Will, quite overcome with this news.

"Yes; I don't know why he hates him so. He is proud; but I don't see what that

matters to father. Mr. Forrest has been here to ask me for the purse; and when I told him about it, he said you must appear in court to say how it came into your possession. That will make father very angry, but right is right; and he thought what you knew was of so much consequence, that he made me promise to go and bear witness myself if you could not be found," pursued Kitty, rather over-doing the case in her anxiety to support it.

"Oh, that will be the right thing of course! Nobody can lay hold of you, you know, and father will be forced to forgive you. But whatever is to become of me now!"

In spite of the melancholy meaning of Will's exclamation, there was a tone of relief in it. He was, indeed, so accustomed to consider himself a creature of circumstances, the sport and plaything of any external power, that to feel prevented from appropriating that purse was a comforting assurance to his compliant conscience. The temptation was removed, and he must turn to something more honest if possible; he had no objection, though what was before him was a very

hazy question. In the meantime his facile mind could interest itself in other little topics ; and as he had seen Miss Elton and her young brother in the Abbey Wood that afternoon, he connected her appearance there with Mr. Forrest's visit to the court.

"Is that affair between Miss Elton and Mr. Forrest on again?" he asked. "She was not many yards off while he was here, and I should not wonder if she joined him after he left you."

Kitty knew nothing about Mr. Forrest's love affairs ; she did not think there could have been any thing serious between those two, they did not look as if they were made for each other at all. Miss Elton had often been to sit with her ; and though she had a quiet way with her, she did not seem to have gone through a disappointment in love.

After a few general remarks Will was persuaded to take a simply rational view of his present circumstances ; and brother and sister were trying to look life in the face as it might show itself to either of them, when their father came home ; and though Dan's acrid temper and unloving ways prevented

any pleasant interchanges, still he was not deficient in the instinctive attributes of a man, and so suffered his errant son to take his place by the hearthstone for awhile.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RUINED CHAPEL.

A BRISK spring shower came upon Mr. Forrest as he left the Abbey Court, and he turned into the wood, knowing that by making his own path he could find the shortest way home. As he was passing the ruined chapel of the old abbey, he heard a highly-pitched child-like voice, which he soon distinguished as that of his former antagonist, Harry Elton. Thinking that Mary might possibly be there too, he felt disposed to look in. Coming upon her in an irregular out-of-the-way manner, when he had so strictly avoided her in her own home, was quite in accordance with his rather loose and shiftY mode of getting through life. He might very naturally have been driven to shelter in the quiet enclosure, so, climbing up by the tangled ivy

to an opening in the wall that had been a window, before the zealous Roundheads had done their duty by the sanctuary, he looked in. Mary had enthroned herself in a niche once occupied by a more stony-looking saint, and was engaged in putting all the heads of Harry's blue-bells together that he might carry them safely home, while he was poking his inquisitive little nose, reverently enough to be sure, into the ancient font. A cry of pleased surprise from the child attracted Mary's attention and fixed Forrest to the spot. Harry had pulled the loosened font from the crumbling wall, and, thrusting his little hand into a newly-made hole, had drawn thence a purse of gold.

"Mamie, this is the treasury and this is the abundance the rich people have cast in!" he shouted, realizing to himself immediately the pleasant Bible story. "I wonder where the widow's mite is, though?" he added, contemplatively, the eager hand feeling carefully in the crevice again for something more.

Looking down from his lonely height, Forrest took in the full significance of this treasure-trove. Daniel Fletcher was not

sufficiently knavish to appropriate the money that had come so strangely into his possession, and yet he could not trust himself or his neighbours with the temptation at home. He had made up his mind not to give it up however—it was to lie hidden until it had done its part in the ruin of the master of Wyckam. It was thus Frederick Forrest read this little mystery, and he was right in his interpretation.

A similar idea flashed through Mary Elton's mind; but before she could rise or think what to do, that peculiar mesmeric attraction, which certainly exists between individuals whose sensibilities are under similar influences, caused her to glance in the direction of Forrest's out-post, and their eyes as naturally met. He dropped down instantly, for he had the common dislike of being caught at a disadvantage; yet, having been caught, it was desirable to make his position good, so he walked into the little desecrated chapel and, as easily as might be, explained himself. He and Mary talked together about this evil purse and its probable purpose in low, cautious tones, as if the detestable

Fletcher might be at hand. Their mutual confidence and evident interest put them at their ease; but it was not in accordance with the precedents of the gay and gentlemanly Forrest to look so beaten and irresolute.

"It is just as if some wretched fate were dogging me," he said. "I am doomed to know all about that money, when such knowledge is sure to be my ruin. I could have sworn with as clear a conscience as Harry there, that I was ignorant of aught concerning it, till singing maiden Eve must write to tell me where it was, thinking I ought to know, because the miserable 'populace said I did know. Half an hour ago I could have taken my oath in innocence, and now there it is again to witness against me!"

Harry's mild blue eyes looked displeased. "I did not think you put it there!" he exclaimed, dropping the purse back into its hiding-place.

"But what evil can by any chance come upon you?" asked Mary anxiously, yet, as Forrest thought, with a shade of slight respect in her tone. She had heard all the unpleasant probabilities, but in his presence they seemed

most absurd, and she would have had them completely ignored by him. It was too absurd for Frederick Forrest to be intimidated by an ignorant and unbefriended weaver !

“ I daresay I am a fool to think any thing about it ; and no harm can possibly ensue if there is no false swearing,” Forrest said ; and then he paused and compelled a smile to move over his face, to hide the expression his consciousness must have called forth. For even he had been tempted to bear false witness. In the lonely miserable hours of which so many had been his latterly, when the idea of himself in the witness-box at the forthcoming trial, undergoing a fire of intensive questioning in the face of a world roused to a cynical suspicion of him by an insane enemy, had really made him almost beside himself, he had thought, if it were not for the admission he had made to Cameron, he might perhaps have denied any knowledge whatever of the stolen money. It was not the threat that Fletcher had made, and which the public had so readily endorsed, that made him shiver. No one could suppose that he had taken the money to apply it in any way

or for any purpose of his own ; but that he had sinister and unclean relations with this bandit and black-leg Jones could not perhaps be denied, at least its denial might involve too much ; and if a Fletcher swore that he had taken the purse to screen Jones, he might never be able to justify himself. Little Harry might have been following all these mental involutions ; he had a child's instinctive hatred of an unnatural smile, and was watching with a weird, suspicious intentness. Mary looked so sympathetic, Forrest felt something of the old, pure charm steal over him. A wise, tender woman to advise, and give the pleasant, wholesome shelter of her love—what a blessing it would be !

“ You, at any rate, are wise, Miss Elton, and will counsel me kindly,” he said ; and as he looked into her eyes,—a real trouble and something like tenderness softening his own,—how was it possible for Mary to be cold and self-possessed ? Yet in this moment of deep interest, there was very little of the jubilant feeling, that had made the interviews of the lovers in the old days so absorbing and delightful. She was indeed too pathetically

mixed up now with life's sad and sullyng experiences to be easily influenced by semblances of the old charms. The exigencies of Forrest's critical position had also been too seriously impressed upon her imagination to dissolve before a smile, however insinuating and pleasant. The idea, therefore, of George Cameron, strong and helpful, asserted itself, coming in between her and Forrest, as if it had been lying in ambush, but, as it seemed, only for this Forrest's sake. So she said calmly,

"Mr. Cameron is far wiser and will advise so much better ; let Harry cover up the purse again, and you can go directly and consult with him."

"I would rather have your advice, even though it may not be so wise. It is more available, and will, I am sure, suit me better."

Mary wished he would not look and speak with that insidious smile and insinuating tone ; she thought prompt and practical action was what was wanted just then. "I can advise nothing," she said ; "but if I were in your place, I would send a constable to Daniel Fletcher and let him account for the concealment of the money. Why should the in-

nocent suffer if the case can be made clear?"

Mary's eyes shone and she felt as if she were taking a great liberty with this intricate affair. He appeared strangely blind to a plain, straightforward way of dealing with the chance, which must tell in his favour if ever he were called to account. She was still more surprised by the singularly involved way in which he took this simple suggestion.

"I serve a Fletcher with a warrant!" he exclaimed; "it would be impossible." Then he paused, looking confused and reluctant. Harry called to him to come and fix up the font, which he said was pinching him. The child was urgent to know what was going to be done with the purse, and having heard the Fletchers named, he wanted to take it to Kitty, who, being particularly pale and weak, and the recipient of some of his mother's good things, was, he supposed, the proper assignee of his treasure.

Glad of a moment for reflection, Mr. Forrest turned to assist Harry.

"Put the purse exactly where you found it, my little man," he said, in the old-fashioned,

constrained way some people have with children—and which children always resent.

Harry especially objected, his antagonism being fully aroused whenever his sister's lover addressed him. "I am not little, nor a man, nor yours; and the purse shall not go back into that dark hole!" he protested, with determined emphasis.

"But it must go back, or you will get us all into trouble; come, put it in, your small hand will go in better than mine," said Forrest.

Seeing that a good deal of importance was being attached to him at this conjuncture, Harry naturally became possessed by an adverse spirit, and, tossing the purse into his sister's lap, he walked demurely out of the chapel.

"What does he mean?" Forrest asked, a tinge of credulity shading his mind. "Would it be out of the order of possibilities for this strange thoughtful child to have some premonitions in this matter? Does he think you should take this money to the police, or even to Mr. Cameron? Perhaps it would be the wiser way to inform

the police; it would certainly be the ordinary one."

He was acting rather meanly in suggesting this devolvement of the responsibility, and he was ashamed of the fact and the reason.

"I think it must go back to its hiding-place now, and you can decide what to do with it afterwards," said Mary, rising, the blue-bells in one hand and the purse of such evil portent in the other. She saw Forrest's reluctance to touch it, and so she put it again into the recess, and then drew back while the loosened font was carefully replaced.

"Thank you, Miss Elton; your kindness has laid me under an obligation." Forrest's eyes were bent upon the ground, but he came close to her side as he added, "If it were not for the graciousness of soul that your face reflects, I should hesitate—nay, I'm a fool to be making speeches now. My future is in your hands. Will you help me?"

Mary trembled before him. The little chapel seemed to have lost walls and roof as

well as windows and doors—all was so limitless, so impalpable. The dreadful, lonely past was gliding away for ever, merging into a radiant calm, a love-bound futurity, with Frederick Forrest for its abiding lord! This feeling of charmed reaction from her long desolation only lasted a very few moments; and the shadow fell all the heavier. An owl that had been solemnly to-whewing over their heads, rushed suddenly from its ivy-covered resting-place, and startled her into the consciousness of having made a strange mistake—surely, before he saw the beatified expression, that must have gone forth from her eyes!

He did not look up as he asked, in a low tone, “Will you suffer us to serve you with a subpoena for the coming trial of Captain Jones?”

She started so, at this rude break to her sweet dream, that he glanced at the troubled face, and perceiving, as he thought, a shy reluctance, he explained quickly, “I mean simply a request that you will just say how I came to know, that the money was hidden here. It may not become a question at all;

but if it should, you could silence Dan Fletcher at once, and save me an infinite amount of trouble and annoyance. May I rely upon you?"

"Certainly!"

It was all she could say. It could be no very hard thing to appear before an indifferent crowd to speak a good word for an honourable and a wrongly-aspersed man—an occasion of self-gratulation indeed, if this man were the lover and friend she used to believe in. But was he honourable? was he not forsworn and selfish? was he not in a false position, and putting her in a false, even an invidious, position, by such a demand?

Either he did not perceive how her soul was being tossed and questioned, or he could not afford to observe her so closely, yet he was moved by her ready generosity.

"Thank you yet again and again, dear Mary!" He put forth both hands in his pleased gratitude, as if he would warmly clasp hers; but she let fall Harry's flowers in her bewilderment, and then stooped to gather them up, in which little office Mr. Forrest courteously assisted. Then, with only

a quiet good-bye, she rejoined her wilful young brother, and went home.

Fred Forrest stood for awhile looking and feeling like one whose light has suddenly gone out in a dark, strange place. Could it be possible that he had been grossly deceiving himself in submitting his soul, as well as his material concerns, to a conventional standard of propriety which might, after all, be convertible to an overweening self-respect and its consequent mistakes? He certainly felt very close upon this state of things, when he saw the last of Mary Elton's pretty, graceful figure, a bright gleam of evening sunlight falling across its dress, as the trees hid her from his eyes.

If George Cameron could have known how close Forrest then was upon asking Mary to overlook his life-long mistake, and set him again in the old love-light, he would not have had to look far into his treasury of opprobrious epithets to find one to suit him. With his natural tendency to lean on a woman's sympathy, and his need of friendly devotedness, Forrest felt the temptation strongly. He knew enough of that tender enthusiasm

with which women rush into self-sacrifice for the one they have loved, if he is under a social shadow, to assure him that he should not ask in vain; yet he had withstood, and was quite desolate. They were both miserable in their separation; but, perhaps, it was better that it should be so, for Mary's mind, with all its faithfulness, was a strong, and hardly-trained one, and must have been aroused sometime, to its utter dismay and his undoing.

Such slight obstacles turn the current of a mortal's destiny, that had it not been for the curious, weak, wayward Harry, who was limping by the side of his silent, yet deeply agitated sister, Mr. Forrest would certainly have followed her—so blank and dismal a void life seemed, now that she had gone out of his sight—and if he had gone with that humble word of his, who could answer for the result? Would he not have been nearer and dearer to the tender, womanly heart, now that his self-complacency was so ruffled, and his pleasant lines so broken, than he had ever been? Again and again he called himself a fool for his pains, as he reflected how he had

brought himself into this lonely and friendless, yet shamefully public dilemma; for he was perfectly aware, that to plead his miserable cause in his present ill-starred condition, would be very ignominious; and even success would be hopelessly embittered. Yet Mary was just the sort of woman he would share his life with gladly, so soft and rose-like to look upon, so wise and withal so sweet to converse with—suggestive, rather than demonstrative—so that in her society he, Frederick Forrest, never quite knew which was the source of the felicity; and this uncertainty has a wondrous charm to a somewhat self-interested soul.

Mary was awake to all the involvements of this state of things; the glamour was assuredly falling from her eyes. She could not help perceiving, that there was something strangely wrong in the precedents, or there could not be this low, bad suspicion, this apparent inability to shake off the loathsome aspersion. Besides, though her hand had trembled in his clasp, and her heart had felt almost as tenderly as in the old proud time, the glory had gone out of the man. There

had not been a shadow of the old reverence. That question of the subpoena had been a cruel scorn. Passing through the shower-besprinkled wood, as hastily as her feeble brother's steps could follow, Mary pondered deeply over this rude break in her long thralldom, and she was now even more than unhappy—as who is not when an idol falls?

Harry's child-like remarks did not lighten her misery. He had got the notion into his head that Mr. Forrest was keeping somebody—Daniel Fletcher, most likely—out of his rights by his knowledge of this purse. He was sure he knew all about the deep hole, and had followed them into the old chapel to see that they did not take it away; and he was going to keep it there, and he was as bad as Ananias, and he would swear falsely and be struck dead.

Afterwards, when he heard the forthcoming trial talked about at home, and found that preparations were being made for his sister to attend in answer to her summons, which came relentlessly, he put all his crude fancies into some sort of form, and confirmed himself in his antipathy.

CHAPTER X.

THE ASSIZE WEEK.

SO much importance Mr. Forrest attached to this appearance of Miss Elton as one of the witnesses, that he actually called to submit his request more formally, not being certain whether or not she would consider herself bound by his rather abrupt exaction of her promise in the Abbey Chapel. When assured that she was to be relied upon, he was further emboldened to ask her to be the guest of his cousins, who resided in the county-town and who had expressed a wish to have her with them during the assize week. Lucy Lawson would fetch her in her pony-carriage and see that she was properly attended, to and from the court. Mary could scarcely refuse this little courtesy without seeming to choose an unpleasantly isolated part.

Lucy, never sorry for any chance that could bring her to Wyckam Hall, was there ready to convey Mary on the day preceding the captain's trial; and the inevitable Harry was so certain he should come to grief, if he were left behind, he was taken as a sheer necessity. Since the rupture between Mary and her Cousin Fred, Miss Lawson had been much more disposed to be friendly, and during the long, quiet drive she made several attempts at being kind and confidential. She also appeared to think some premonitory advice would not be ill bestowed.

"Fred was so foolishly sensitive about this affair," she said, "he might look vexed or disturbed, and every change of countenance was noted down to a person's disadvantage and was considered to go against him; so that a heart of stone, and a face to correspond, were really the chief good to be prayed for. Then there was that opposing attorney, who was a most wretched, querulous being, though he was a relative; and who was so experienced in disreputable cases he could make the best man feel like a miserable sneak and outlaw, and look so of course.

He was sure to get hold of him and pull him all to pieces in the cross-examination."

"And he will puzzle you too, Mary, if you give him the slightest hold. Just say you were sitting weaving flowers together, a long way from your brother, when he came accidentally upon the purse; and that Mr. Forrest came into the chapel especially to see you."

"How can I say that?" Mary asked abruptly.

"Because it will be the best thing to say for him; besides, he would not have gone in if he had not seen you. I know him well enough to answer for that," Miss Lawson retorted, with some sharpness.

"But he heard Harry cry out about the money before he knew I was there at all—at least, I think so—and I have no reason to suppose he would have sought me there or anywhere else. You know that, Miss Lawson."

There was some little tone of resentment in Mary's voice as she protested thus against being called upon to lay her maidenly pride at Mr. Forrest's feet.

"How difficult it is to talk to you matter-of-fact, truth-worshipping people! You never

can see any shading in things ; you ought to live at the north pole and spend your lives at arithmetic."

Lucy spoke warmly, but condescended to come quickly to the gist of her argument again.

"You can hold your tongue, at any rate?"

"Yes, I think so," said Mary, laughing.

"But you must make up your mind even to do that. I have been in court many times during the assizes, and I know those barristers are just like the biologists: they can take their own identity out of their subjects and put in any moral consciousness they choose."

"I have never been present at any trial, and feel rather nervous at the thought of being questioned by those dry-looking, clever lawyers ; but it seems to me that he must be a strangely-possessed person who could make me say any thing to harm any one if I did not wish to say it, or who could make Mr. Forrest look like a felon," Mary replied, brave in tone, though turning away her face, so that no blush could radiate from underneath the close cottage-bonnet she wore.

After their arrival and an early tea Miss Lawson proposed that they should go to the public walks for an hour. She did not say that any appointment had been made, but appeared rather expectant and impatient of little Harry's perpetual presence. "What are we to do with him?" she asked peevishly, as the child insisted upon going down one of the more sequestered paths, and pulled hard at Mary's hand to get her more to himself. "I wish boys were born grown-up, there is such an age of defiant struggle with everything that's pleasant and proper, from frocks to flirting. You had better go with him down there, he is making us quite conspicuous, and I particularly wish to keep well in the world's sight just now."

Thus cast off by her mature companion, and led by Harry's lawless will, Mary was soon far away from the open, frequented paths, penetrating bowery recesses and interwoven labyrinths, where ways and means seemed bent upon making common cause with sweet, alluring, and all-conquering obscurities. They found the wilderness and the warren, where wild creatures were ex-

pected to increase and replenish the perpetually desolated place, and to feel and act as though a region of inviolate space lay between them and the prying eyes of a peccant humanity. These mysterious solitudes had a strong effect upon the boy, and he insisted upon having a game at bears ; so Mary was compelled to make a great polar bear of herself, and to sprawl along the ground and growl in a most wonderful and inhuman fashion. At first Harry's terror was of course feigned ; but their mutual acting gained the better of his reason, and his impressionable young soul was soon wrought upon till he got into a paroxysm of fright ; and after running at the top of his speed to the place where they had left Miss Lawson, he paused for breath, and then, seeing Mary in pursuit of her wild little victim, either imagination or humour got the mastery, and he threw himself on his knees and uplifted his clasped hands, crying out, very frantically, " O Lord, deliver me from this dreadful bear ! "

Mary caught him up, feeling very much shocked, for the fervour was rather ill-timed and startling.

"Hush, child! That is very naughty," said she, putting down his hands.

"Naughty to say my prayers, Mamie, when I am frightened?"

"But you were not frightened really: we were only playing, you know."

"Must I only say my prayers when I am sleepy and don't want to?"

A hearty laugh caused Mary to raise her eyes from the inconvenient little pietist's face: Fred Forrest and Lucy Lawson were looking on, intense amusement overspreading the lady's face.

"I would almost as soon have the getting-up of my grandmother's old lace as a child," said she, while her expressive regard of poor Harry nearly annihilated him.

"I think this is the first time I have been mistaken for a bear, Miss Elton," Mr. Forrest remarked, naturally concluding that it was his unexpected appearance that had evoked this ebullition on the part of his youthful and tiny foe.

Mary was beginning to explain that she was the bear of the drama, when Lucy Lawson said, with abrupt seriousness, "Fred

has something particular to say to you, Mary, and you must go with him down this path as far as Coot's island. Walk slowly, and I will take Harry to see the monkeys, and then join you."

"No, thank you; I will go with Mamie—but not with Fred," the child protested, with much determination in his frightened face.

Blushing for his rudeness and the strange order she had just received, and much disconcerted by the reserved courtesy with which Mr. Forrest requested her company alone for a few minutes, Mary pushed Harry away and turned in the direction indicated; while the trembling boy, dragged forward by Miss Lawson's relentless hand, did not recover from the unusual shock to his feelings, till he found himself stilled by a counter-shock of disgust and horror before the monkey-house.

A casual wanderer coming from Coot's island and meeting a handsome but rufesque gentleman and lady—the one speaking in earnest, dejected tones, the other listening with a dismay that seemed too much for her

strength—passed them with a shy glance of sympathy for the sorrows to which lovers have always been so prone.

A half-interpreted sentence might have reached the stranger's willing ear: "Selfish as it may seem to you—and to me now—I thought I might redeem myself through you."

Miss Lawson was at the appointed place before them. Enduring and self-possessed, and endowed with the sweet spirit of mercy as Mary Elton was, Forrest and his cousin had reckoned too much on her strength, and on the presumption that some indifference must have resulted from her old lover's long neglect. She had been so overcome by that which he had to tell, as to feel for some time the impossibility of going forward by his side and meeting Lucy's enlightened eyes. She had told him, in tones very unlike her own gentle and reverent tones, to go away and never to think of seeing her face again. She had been too indignant to weep, and then had wept passionately because he had suffered in making her suffer. When she and Forrest appeared at last, her eyes were dry and bright, and her step was firm and dignified,

but she looked as if nothing in the world could concern her more; and Lucy, for once in her life, was touched and silent. The eager, innocent joy of Harry at seeing his sister, helped them all.

Mr. Forrest made a silent bow and went to his hotel, awaiting the morrow. Lucy took Mary's arm and led her towards her home. No word was spoken till they reached the door, when Miss Lawson asked if she would prefer remaining untroubled during the trial, or if she intended to keep her promise and speak up for Fred.

"I have left it with him; if he needs me, I shall be ready," said Mary. "We will say good-night now."

In her heart she hoped Fred's difficulties would not be so exigent as to require her voice to be lifted up; but she was prepared to accompany Miss Lawson to the Assize Courts in the morning. For once the thousand and one little exactions of a fashionable attire had been to some good purpose: Lucy had had no time to talk to her, and was too much engaged with her own charms to notice Mary's miserable appearance, and she knew

better than to trouble her with inconvenient observations.

Having no particular occupation or interest in any thing, Lucy was a regular frequenter of the courts, and her well-known and handsome presence was an easy introduction for her and her companion.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRIAL.

THE free, convivial characteristics of the late happy and flourishing army agent were greatly modified as he stood at the bar awaiting his trial. As the leading circumstances of the highway robbery, in which Captain Jones was presumptively so deeply concerned, have been narrated already, the evidence of the cheesefactor and the host of the half-way house need not be recorded. Mr. Forrest was the third person placed in the witness-box for the prosecution. Under the examination to which he was subjected, his demeanour, naturally so courteous (Cameron, in one of his acute moods, had said he would apologize to a cat if he trod upon her toes), was almost distressingly urbane. Forrest might have been a special pleader instead of a disin-

terested witness, yet he was very generally admired, a certain pathetic tremor softening the lines of his handsome face and modulating his rich voice. He never looked towards the prisoner, seldom indeed raising his eyes lest he might meet the gaze of any one; when he did look up their expression was slightly timid and deprecatory. He had been flattered and pleased all his life, and knew he had but to show his face and make his graceful bow to be welcomed and made interesting; it was not likely, therefore, that he should feel at ease when a clever, antagonistic and most keen barrister persisted in a close and impertinent cross-examination, his hardly-lined face declaring war to the death against every thing but naked truth, and his wig exhibiting more wiry hair and stiffer curls than any other man's head could show.

Mr. Forrest's evidence was all given manfully enough to satisfy most people, with the exception of this rather excessive courtesy; and when he told how he alone had gone up the step-ladder into the hay-loft, in defiance of all caution and in the face of a certain peril, a thrill fluttered through the close ranks

of sympathetic ladies and made some men look proud of him. When he said that in kicking about the hay in the dark loft he had stirred up an animated something, which, to his great surprise, assumed to itself the voice of Captain Jones, declaring that he would not have surrendered to any other man in England, the lawyers round the baize-covered table exchanged glances, and this iron-browed barrister who held the prisoner's brief dotted down something with a vehement spirt.

Rising, when all had apparently been said, this acute antagonist thrust his hands into his pockets as if his determination were too much for him, and with a confiding nod to the public, which said, plainly as speech, "This fine gentleman is not going to take us in," he directed himself against Mr. Forrest in a manner that made Mary's blood tingle and Mr. Cameron set his teeth at him. With every question those resolute hands were dug deep into his pockets, as if they were never to come out again, and that wise head was jerked impetuously. With each answer he received, the hands were as suddenly withdrawn, as if they had some occult affinity

with the evidence, and his assured smile seemed to say to all present, that he had got precisely what he expected, as they all very well knew.

“I understood you to say, sir, that the prisoner at the bar remarked, he would not have surrendered to any other man in England—why, do you suppose, did he make this special exemption in your favour?” This question was hurled at Mr. Forrest twice before he replied distinctly enough to suit his cross-questioner.

“I don’t know, of course, exactly. Perhaps, knowing me, he thought I should try to help him with a good word or two.”

This answer could not but sound absurdly mild, and pointed the next question venomously.

“What earthly cause could you have given this Captain Jones—excuse me, gentlemen, if I use a false style, the prisoner is so called in the indictment—what cause could you have given this suspected highwayman for looking to you for a good word?”

“I said, knowing me, he might expect it. Such things are not unprecedented, I hope?”

"Keep to the point, sir. We have no time for moral reflections. You acknowledge that there was an intimacy between you, Mr. Forrest of Wyckam Hall, I believe, and this prisoner at the bar?"

There was a murmured interruption from the judge: "Not intimacy, witness merely said, 'knowing him.'"

Bowing his acknowledgment of the correction, the barrister proceeded, "You, Mr. Forrest of Wyckam Hall, and Captain Jones were old acquaintances—I have no desire to be intrusive upon private friendships, but it is necessary that we should know what great favour you had already conferred upon Captain Jones, that he should look for help from you in such a strange emergency as arrest for highway robbery."

"I may not have conferred any great favour; the captain was a tenant of mine," Forrest replied obligingly, though the court pronounced against the question.

"And paid his rent punctually, no doubt?" This was said with a contemptuous grimace. "Did it ever occur to you that when you were remitting this tenant's rent, year after

year, you were laying yourself under an obligation to him?"

"Certainly not; how could I? Besides, I did not remit his rent altogether."

"You were already under an obligation to Captain Jones and remitted his rent, or, in other words, suffered him and his family to occupy a house of yours rent-free, in liquidation of that obligation?" Forrest's persecuting questioner could not have looked wiser and better satisfied with himself, if he had accounted for the perversity of human nature in the face of its evident good.

"I never said my tenant's rent was remitted, and don't suppose he ever made any such statement."

"Probably not; when a man is on his oath we draw inferences from his reservations. We know his rent was remitted; and we must know why. What was the nature of the obligation under which you lay to Jones?"

Forrest looked confused, and paused; but as every eye was upon him in expectation of a reply, and as those two keen, relentless eyes fixed him, he must give his answer somehow.

"I had a mind to try my hand at rouge-et-noir when I was young and inexperienced, and therefore curious and bold, and Jones, who was an old player, warned and saved me from some trouble. I object to these questions, but would rather reply to them than not, my lord," Forrest said, bowing to the judge, who evidently thought the crisp wig was difficult, and even more out of order than usual.

"That was at one of the Badens in eighteen hundred and ——?"

Forrest looked up surprised. "Yes."

"Were you alone on that journey?"

After some hesitation the witness said, "Not quite."

"You were not quite alone! Now, my lord, what evidence is this? Surely there is no mediate state between being alone and not alone? Do you mean to swear that you were accompanied by an animal or a ghost?" The learned counsel laughed cynically, and seemed to expect the court to share his humour, but Forrest looked distressed and carried the sympathy with him.

"I was not accompanied by an animal or a ghost," he said.

"Yet you were not quite alone? I have

known women who would come very near to this idea of nullity. Were you accompanied by a woman?" Counsel looked as if he had made a great hit.

Mr. Forrest's lips quivered and his brow was damp and white. He appeared unable to give voice to a reply, and looked towards the counsel for the prosecution as if for some alleviation.

The barrister rose instantly and asked, "Who is the responsible person in the defence, as there is evidently some secret sinister motive at work?"

An irrepressible attorney ejaculated, "The prisoner, Captain Jones, I should think!"

"I cannot permit the witness to be brow-beaten in this way, and I insist upon an answer to my question, as a witness who is yet to be examined has declared that every sovereign in the stolen purse should be used in exposing the gentleman now under examination."

His lordship said the question was irregular.

"I beg your lordship's pardon, but it is quite as regular as inquiring into the private relationships of a witness."

"That remains to be seen. My questions

are all leaders to the main point, the discredit of my client's principal and most obnoxious witness." This was said by the prisoner's counsel with a candour somewhat rare under the circumstances, but he knew his ground and never trod lightly.

"I do not impugn my learned friend's acuteness or candour, but I submit that he has accepted a tainted case."

Before Forrest's plain-dealing friend could say any more he was silenced by the judge, as being quite too definite. "I shall have my swing in the cross of the next witness," he said, to avenge himself as he sat reluctantly down; while his grim antagonist continued,—

"It was not your mother who accompanied you on that little tour when you were not quite alone?"

"No."

"Come, who was it? Was it your wife?"

There was such a sensation in the hall at this preposterous question, such an universal conviction that Fred Forrest, the comely bachelor of Wyckam Hall, could but look overwhelmed and abashed, that no answer was expected of him. Only one

florid lady, with bold black eyes, looked with a singular expression of pity and anxiety, and another more diffident maiden bowed her head low upon her breast.

"Never mind; we know it was your wife," the hard, jeering voice declared. "Now tell us, was that the first time Captain Jones saw your wife?"

Forrest's lips parted, but only a sigh escaped. He wiped his brow, and appeared reluctant to issue again even from the flimsy obscurity of his pocket-handkerchief. After some little waiting, inexpressibly painful to himself, and perhaps to a few others, he took heart and said, with some spirit, "I protest against this mode of cross-examination, my lord. The learned counsel for the defence has either mistaken this for the prisoner's box or he is strangely oblivious of the dignity of his part."

Something so like applause stirred the so recently hushed assembly, the judge glanced round, with stern rebuke on his lowering brow. He never liked the badgering system of obtaining evidence, but it was still more objectionable to have the court contemned. The

nascent approbation was quickly suppressed, but the irritable barrister thought well to withdraw his question, though his manner was even more scornful and insinuating.

"I need not press this question," he remarked; and added, with his unpleasantly suggestive emphasis, "We know the prisoner at the bar afterwards married this nullity—this woman; and we conclude that it was in consideration of this favour that he expected help from you, when apprehended for a highway robbery."

A seething sound, like some angry force in repression, interrupted him for a few seconds; but he applied his interrogation, and the people were too anxious to hear to sustain their manifestation.

"Did you tell Captain Jones you would answer for his innocence?"

"No."

"Did you promise to render him what help you could?"

"No."

"What was it that passed between you during those five or six minutes that you and Captain Jones were together in the hay-loft?"

"We were not together half a minute. There are people here who will swear that I was not out of their sight ten seconds."

"We will wait, if you please, till their turn comes. What passed between you and Captain Jones while you were together?"

"When I had kicked the hay about and stumbled upon the captain, I exclaimed, 'Is this you, captain? I wouldn't have had this happen for a good deal!' And he replied, 'I surrender to you, but would not have done to any other man in England.'"

"Was that all?"

"He said something about my getting him off."

"For the sake of the Virgin Mary?"

Forrest smiled in spite of his chagrined position. "Have it so, if it please you," he said.

"For whose sake was it, then, sir?"

"For the sake of the Madonna, I suppose you mean."

"And does not that amount to the same thing?"

"Well, not exactly, I should imagine, in this case at least."

"You are not asked to imagine, sir—you are on your oath. Who is this Madonna?"

"Only that nullity you spoke of just now," Forrest replied. His was not a disposition to succumb for long, and he was goaded to flippancy.

"Will you swear you took nothing from him, no purse or money to conceal from those who were waiting to take him into custody?"

Knowing the evil report that had been spread, Mr. Forrest's eyes flashed, and he raised his head with a quick gesture expressive of proud contempt; but, recollecting himself, he condescended to say, "I swear I received neither purse nor money at Captain Jones's hand."

"Will you swear that neither directly nor indirectly any knowledge of such purse or money has been conveyed to you?"

Forrest bent his proud head again and was silent. The question was repeated with venom, when, for the first time, he glanced towards the prisoner. Jones was not proof against the strong impulse that moved him. He directed a most eloquent look of appeal to the witness, which evidently added a

new trouble to his already overfreighted soul.

Mr. Cameron, who had been waiting for this moment with inexpressible anxiety, and who had been so fearful lest it should escape him, rose up and bent his ear that he might catch the witness's reply. His large, rugged head so suddenly introduced could not but be seen; perhaps it gave the little fillip the perturbed Forrest needed. At any rate, the answer came.

"No—I will not swear to that."

"Did whatever information you have received come in any form from the prisoner at the bar?"

"No."

The counsel for the defence sat down precipitately, simply saying "he was satisfied," but looking as triumphantly wicked as if he had been a certificated Mephistopheles.

This scene, revealing as it had done something of the grievous wrong Daniel Fletcher had experienced through Mr. Forrest, had added to his eagerness to get himself avenged. He scarcely waited to be summoned, and in his statements was continually confounding

the last witness with the prisoner. He had no direct evidence to give either for or against Captain Jones, and was only subpoenaed on his son's account; whose recent relations with the captain were not unsuspected. Several times this spontaneous witness had to be called back to the point at issue, so bent was he on making head-way against his old foe. He had sufficient self-respect to suppress his sister's name, but it was plain to all that he was personally connected with the woman who had given rise to the grim humour of the defendant's counsel.

The prosecution could make nothing out of Fletcher; he did not mean to inculcate his son, and took care to keep him clear, evading and forswearing himself with remarkable coolness and consistency.

"And now," he exclaimed, in his high, unpleasant tones, as if he were reading from a book, "I have something more to say that may or may not concern those here present. Any of you gentlemen as choose may go to the Abbey Chapel at our place—a mile or two out of Framborough it is—and in a cranny in the old wall, behind a

sort of stone basin that has got loose, you will find a wash-leather purse, such as men use who have much dealings with money. It is nearly full of sovereigns, I never counted them, for I was dazed-like at the sight and the finding of them there. Now who put that purse there? Who but Squire Forrest of Wyckam Hall? I see him myself a-haunting of the place—I followed him in and found the purse there.”

At this juncture, while the judge was saying something to somebody in authority and the barristers were talking to each other about this unprecedented turn affairs were taking, Mr. Cameron hurried out of court. Mr. Forrest attempted to follow him, but was detained officially, it appeared. He felt, indeed, as if under arrest, either at his country's indication or his own inner consciousness.

Daniel Fletcher was hotly cross-examined. Did he see Mr. Forrest put the purse there? “Not exactly.” Did he speak to him? “No.” What led him to go to that very cranny? “It looked loosened, and he thought he would see why.”

Nothing was educed ; but one man had sworn away the fair fame, perhaps the life, of another ; and Providence at present leaves men to fight out their own cause, without creating a special and divinely accredited avenger.

Mary Elton saw Mr. Forrest's shoulder touched by a sceptre-like thing ; and knew what that touch implied. She thought his eye sought her from amongst the crowd in which she was standing ; she was sure a call from some sphere, earthly or otherwise, reached her ear, and she felt drawn out of herself and compelled to speak. One attempt failed to attract attention, there was such a hubbub in the court. A second time she raised her fine young voice, it did not tremble or hesitate, she was acting so unconsciously : " My lord, this man has told a lie."

Every one turned towards this young lady who stood up and spoke so firmly, and yet looked so perfectly modest and refined, and who repeated her assertion, " Daniel Fletcher is bearing false witness."

The court was naturally disposed to courtesy towards this brave but gentle girl ; and,

as it was discovered that she had been served with a subpoena, she was placed in the witness-box. But alas, for the chivalry of womanhood! She could only tell the little story of her visit to the chapel with her young brother, of the shower of April rain, and the weaving of the flower-wreath, and the discovery of the treasure. Then, after a moment's hesitation, a blush softened the marble-like face, and she added, "Mr. Forrest came in to us, to shelter also, and was as much surprised as we were to see the purse in such a place."

Habit, or his natural disposition, was nearly overmastering the cynical barrister's better judgment and spoiling his case. He rose with that self-sufficient, uncivilly familiar manner which had made him personally so objectionable yet often successful, and was beginning to cross-examine Mary Elton as ruthlessly as he had done Mr. Forrest. Indeed there appeared a fairer chance now of enjoying his peculiar humour. He was hissed at the commencement of his attack, for there is a good amount of kindly sentiment in public; but he managed to insert a few poignancies. So when Mary ceased speaking,

and the consciousness of her position made her turn in the vain desire to escape and hide from all those eyes, he remarked, "To be sure, my dear young lady, we understand all about this. Mr. Forrest, being a sort of lover of every pretty girl he knows, followed you into the chapel at the old abbey. It was quite natural that he should be there to help twine the garlands and see you pleasantly through the thunder-storm. We take him to be a general lover, you know; because if he were a particular one, the fact would militate against your evidence. Still, from what we know of the ruling passions of men, it is just as probable that he had been in the chapel before, and was hovering about the scene for the sake of his hidden treasure; for whatever a man's first love may be, his second is pretty sure to be gold."

Unmistakable signs of disapproval from the higher region of the court saved Mary from further impertinence, and after two or three explanations she was suffered to go down.

Mr. Cameron met her immediately; and thanked her with a smile and gentle courtesy

that were more welcome to her just then than any less homelike sunshine could have been. She took his arm and he led her quickly out of the place.

"You are wanted again, Mary; but in a very different way," he said, still walking fast and pressing her forward. "Perhaps you did not know that Kitty Fletcher is here. Forrest and I brought her last night, expecting this lie from Dan. She knows all about the stolen purse, and was quite willing to come to save her father, as she said, from doing any one such a wrong; but it has been too much for her. I am afraid she is very ill. I went to fetch her when that false evidence was spoken, but she cannot be moved, and asked to see you."

They stopped at a house just at hand; and both went in to Kitty's apartment, a small room hired for the night.

It had been too much for her indeed, and Kitty would never go home again, at least not to the pleasant Abbey Court she thought worth living for. But she was not dismayed or taken by surprise, only anxious and grieved that the purpose of her journey had been frustrated.

"So father has done as he threatened against Mr. Forrest, Miss Elton?" she said, as soon as she saw Mary; and then the bad cough and the lost breath had to be overcome before she could continue. "I am so sorry, chiefly for poor father, because he has done wrong and will be very wretched sometime, when he returns to his right mind. I couldn't go to stop him."

Mary tried to soothe her with comforting words; she too was sorry, had been very wretched; but life's miseries get strangely modified and transfigured before such a vast change as encompasses the dying. Worldly follies and earthly loves will sometimes become sacred responsibilities, or fade in the rarer atmosphere.

"Never mind about me, Miss Elton," said Kitty, in her simple, faithful way; "I shall come all right in a little time; because I couldn't help it. I want to tell you how it can be mended. Will knows, and perhaps if he were here now I could persuade him to speak. Will is a coward and a foolish boy, but he is not bad."

"Where is he now?" Mr. Cameron asked.

“At home, in Abbey Court; unless——”

He did not wait for the alternative; but, thinking it was just possible that the trial would last over two or three hours, and that if it lasted three hours, Will Fletcher might be brought up and made to confront his father and expose the falsity of his evidence, he pressed a chaise and two good horses into the attempt, and, embuing the postilion with his own zeal, was at the George Hotel in Framborough in an hour and a quarter. With a police-officer to get the purse he hastened through the by-ways to the abbey, and, fearing to frighten away his shy quarry if he showed himself too soon, he sent one of the children of the court to tell Will there was a messenger from his sister, who was taken ill, waiting for him. The errand was accomplished, for though Will was evidently very much startled when he saw who the messenger was, and seemed quite disposed to decamp, Mr. Cameron's hand was on him, and having got the purse, they all hurried back to the court.

On the road Will was told what had been done and what was required of him. Kitty's critical condition affected his foolish, but not

hard, heart so sensibly that he did not make any decided objection to do what she had said he must do. Only when they got out and were going into the Assize Court he trembled very much, and said, "I am giving myself up after all. You won't let them deal very hard with me?"

"Speak the truth, like a man, and I don't think it will go very hard with you," Mr. Cameron replied; adding, partly to himself, the reflection, which, however unflattering, was consoling to the lad, "he looks like such a young fool they won't transport him."

But was he in time?

Hurried and impetuous as Mr. Cameron had been, he had not omitted to leave a notification with the prosecutor's counsel of the serious illness of a very important witness, and also of his errand. The cheese-factor, naturally desirous of losing no chance that might aid in the discovery of his missing gold, had managed to get the trial lengthened out beyond any apparent necessity, as many of the weary waiters thought, because he believed in Cameron and trusted his promise.

Though every one knew the prisoner's

attorney had no scruples, and though Jones had not any one except Dan Fletcher and a stranger to speak for him, there was so little strongly-defined evidence against him his acquittal seemed probable. His lordship had remarked that the case might have been better prepared, and the jury were in trepidation lest they should not be able to put this *bête noir* out of their nightly rides, this disturbing ghost from their firesides. Little scraps of paper circulated amongst the lawyers as if they were trying to lighten their existence by some passing game of wits. They were demurring as to the expediency of obtaining the deposition of this witness whose illness was so inopportune, when Mr. Cameron entered with his captive. Before he could realize his actual presence in a court of justice or think of any subterfuge, Will Fletcher was in the witness-box and compelled to speak to some issue. At the instant the long-pent-up dread of being caught broke into a wild terror, and he was as unpoised as a hysterical girl. He felt as if a mighty flood were bearing him away, whither he knew not, but all was dark and painful;

and then suddenly those dreadful waters subsided and left him denuded of every sort of screen or coigne of refuge, while all those people and judge and jury were sitting in judgment on him. Then, as the case is with people in a great personal strait sometimes, he seemed lifted out of his immediate consciousness and lived again some of those intenser moments the past held for him. He was in a bright room in a lively London house, where he had once been so strangely happy; and his beautiful Cousin Eve, in her gorgeous oriental dress, was talking to him, half mockingly, half tenderly. He heard her voice saying, "You will never be a man till you have been caught and tried and suffered."

This vision might have been sent to save him, for he took heart of the little grace and spoke out like a man.

"I knew nothing of Captain Jones except that he was the husband of my aunt and lived with her in the old farm-house in Fen Lane. I went to live with them, to take care of the horses that were kept in the underground stable that Dick Turpin used there. We stayed in the house most part of the day-

time to have our meals and rest ourselves, because we were out a good deal at night."

Here a grizzled head suddenly started up to point some question, when another rose as suddenly to silence it.

"Let the witness alone; he knows what he is about."

This recognition of his tact and capacity renewed Will's spirit, and he repeated, with more confidence, "Because we were generally out at night, playing cards or chess in the large towns. He was a fine hand at chess, was the captain, and accepted many of the challenges that appeared in the newspapers; but I think he made the best thing of the cards. I did not often play, and should have managed better with more practice; my finessing put them out, they said."

The pens that had been going as if they all belonged to one governing hand, paused simultaneously, and a stern, practical voice asked, "What put them out, sir?"

"My finessing."

"What is that? a sort of cheating?"

"Well, it is not exactly cheating, you know—it requires rather more intellect; but

it has to be done cleverly and with a sort of system, or it misleads your partner and is not more useful than plain cheating would be."

Will was in danger of gliding into a high and patronizing style while on his favourite topic, till reminded, unfeelingly, to go on.

"We used to ride home together in the small hours of the morning after the bets were settled. One night, I believe it was the night in which the robbery was committed between the Spinnies," the witness made a full stop and fixed his gaze upon the prisoner. It was the first time he had observed his presence there, and appeared to be the first time he had realized that he was witnessing against him and in his sight.

Captain Jones returned the gaze, but quietly; and, without a shade of anger or fear passing over his clever and good-humoured face, he said, "Go on, lad, you haven't to mind me now."

There was a little difficulty in Will's throat to be got over, and then he continued his story.

"The night of the highway robbery between the Spinnies, I think the captain went

out alone, and he never came back. The beautiful black horse he rode came home by himself an hour or so before daybreak. I heard him come and let him in to the stable. You have to go through the house to get into the stable, and through the coal-cellar and a long, dark passage. It is not a lively place to be in by oneself at night; but the horse was very sensible and good-natured, and I had to groom him well and clean his harness. I was cleaning the saddle, which was a good deal splashed—it was a fine foreign-made saddle, very curious, with a strong peaked front, and pockets in it—when I came upon a purse of money in one of the pockets.” The witness paused, his smooth, ruddy face was much disturbed, for he had gone through much tribulation of spirit on account of that incontinent discovery; and he could not help wondering whither his confessions were leading him and his late master. The pens of the ready writers were all in air, and every eye was turned upon the prisoner at the bar. He bore the ordeal without any other sign than the momentary lowering of his great dark eyes.

"I always carried my purse in that pocket, it was the safest way," Jones said, in his full, gentle tone of voice.

The captain, being a man of stratagems and resources, never accredited Will with so much simplicity as to suppose he would ever describe or deliver up that purse. He knew that it had not been recognized at present, and concluded that his young nephew had it in safe keeping, and meant that it should be so. There was no need, then, for disquieting himself. Nothing could be proved against him so long as the money was not his accuser. As the witness appeared incapable of getting on alone, a barrister rose and asked, with the potency of a Fate, what he did with the purse of money when he had found it.

"I hid it under the coals, thinking the captain would come home every minute," Will replied, almost thankful for the tonic.

"But the captain did not get home at all; so what did you do with the money afterwards?"

"I hung about the place till daylight, and then went to the half-way house to see about

him. He stayed there sometimes for a day or two at a stretch. There I learned that this robbery had happened, and that the constable was on the captain's heels. The ostler told me this. He said a party had gone to the farmhouse to search for him. Of course I did not believe a word of it, but I was not for going back just while the place was so hot. For an hour or two I kept in the fields, yet could not help keeping a watch for the result of the search that was going on; and I saw them taking the captain away in a coach, with handcuffs on him. Then I went back to the stable, but every thing was gone, the horses too, so it was no longer any place for me, and I went home."

"You are on your oath, young man!" the irresistible questioner asserted. "Do you mean to swear that the purse of money was gone with the horses when you returned to the stable?"

"No, I don't swear about the money at all."

"But you must. What did you do with the money when you returned to look for it amongst the coals?"

Feeling as if the cold, grey eye of this Fate

had been upon him all the time, Will shivered, and said, "I took it home with me."

"What, to your father's house?"

"Yes, I left it there and went to London directly."

"Did you give it up to your father?"

"No; I did not see my father."

"To whom did you give the money?"

"To my sister Kitty, the girl that is so ill, and who would have been here instead of me if she could."

Will put the broad back of one of his hands before his eyes, for Mr. Cameron had told him that Kitty could not live to go home again.

"Cannot this girl give evidence? She must be made to speak. We must confront her with this Daniel Fletcher."

His hard-featured cynical opponent said drily, "The girl is dying, and Daniel Fletcher is her father."

During Will's evidence the purse and its contents had been handed into court. The police-officer having made his statement, the cheese-factor was re-sworn, and he identified the leathern bag by the recognition of his private mark.

Such a sharp fire of opinion and sarcasm ensued amongst the learned friends about the bar and bench, that his lordship interposed, by saying, as he turned over his documents—

“There is no evidence that this Daniel Fletcher has feloniously appropriated any of this money; on the contrary, he has sworn, and the young lady has substantiated this evidence, that the purse had been concealed, intact. He may have been guilty of perjury; some part of his statement bears this interpretation, unless he has been deceived by his son, or he may have made himself responsible to an action for defamation. He appears to have some strong feeling of resentment against this Mr. Forrest of Wyckam, just or otherwise; the said Mr. Forrest is capable of looking into that. At present he is simply a witness, and no felon.”

Daniel Fletcher was anything but reassured under this high patronage. It was not good for him to have any of his tender points touched, even by the most sacred of legal fingers.

From the revelations his son had made, and which would be certified by Kitty if

she lived, he saw that he had lost one important hold on his hated enemy, as he regarded Forrest. The poor man was faithful to a holy instinct in this sense of injury, though he might have set himself wrongly to work in its vindication. For nearly twenty years he had writhed under the knowledge that his beautiful and gifted sister, because she was a poor, defenceless girl, had been appropriated by a young gentleman, simply as an item amongst his other light commodities, and thrown aside as heedlessly when a new interest intervened—body and soul smirched past recognition either by men or angels. For the last few years this sense of grievous wrong had been intensified by the marriage of this injured woman to an unknown adventurer; and he accredited Forrest with this indignity also.

During the cross-examination of Mr. Forrest a sudden and vital idea had pierced Dan Fletcher's mind. He had heard nothing to take hold of, but he had been like a man looking vaguely out into a dark northern sky, and had seen it all quiver with some

struggling under-swell of light, which would reveal intense secrets, if only the quivering light would break into a sustained flame. Ever since, he had sat brooding over this nebulous idea, till it evolved into what he was most eager to believe; and though his son's witness, and the mention of Kitty's illness, drew him off for a time, he was only the more convinced and satisfied with his rapidly crystallizing suspicion, when it recurred. The captain's fate was comparatively of little moment; perhaps his sister would be more ready to tell the true story of her life, if her putative husband were out of the way.

When Will left the witness-box he could scarcely believe that he was free to walk about, and think and listen like other people, having been convinced for so long that he had only to show himself to be finally suppressed. He got close to Mr. Cameron as soon as possible, because he knew he was trustworthy and strong, though he had regarded him as his arch-enemy hitherto.

The verdict went against the captain, the jurymen—being men of the class who must

ride through those ill-omened lanes in the night-time—were convinced that it should be given against him; they had waited for Will's evidence, that and the purse were conclusive. They modified the result of their deliberation, however, by a strongly expressed plea for a merciful judgment, as the evidence which had been given was circumstantial; and they felt uneasy that such grave issues should hang from such slightly established proof. The judge perhaps sympathized with their scruples, for after saying, with some earnestness, that the prisoner was either guilty or not guilty; that if he were guilty the law was definite, and he was amenable to it; and if not guilty, neither law, nor jury, nor judge had any right over him, he sentenced him to transportation for seven years; remarking that no bodily injury had been done, and that transportation was a convertible term, dependent in a great degree upon prestige and character. So the complacent, debonair Captain Jones was dismissed to alleviate his own and other conditions, under somewhat trying circumstances, as he might find it possible and pleasant.

Poor little Kitty was sitting up on the old-fashioned sofa, in her town lodgings, waiting for Mr. Cameron to bring Will to her, as he had promised, when the trial should be over; and Mary Elton was by her side. So wasted by her illness, so worn through by her ardent soul, which was longing for the vision and the voices of Heaven, yet half dreading that her appearance would be wretched and out of place there, Kitty looked as if she had already passed the limit of material things. She had never known the questionable luxury of having a life to herself, and now another profound interest shared her last minutes with death. Would poor foolish Will pull through well? Though her voice was scarcely audible, Mary understood how keenly alive she was to the doubt that he would make some desperate plunge to escape, or forswear himself, or otherwise show his pusillanimous character. Beautiful and thankful was the light that shone over her face when this erring brother of hers came in, for she saw instantly that all was well. Mr. Cameron was so touched by her pure desire and satisfaction, that

he would call him nothing worse than a troublesome young dog, who had led him a pretty chase, and made him needlessly angry for years. Then he added, "I shall leave him to his conscience now, since he shows some sign of possessing one."

After he had said this in his usual arrogant style, Mr. Cameron looked towards Mary with a sudden change in his manner, and as if her acquiescence were needed, and she smiled sadly enough.

Kitty did not live many days. Her one cherished idea that she should pass away some bright sunny evening, with the sweet spring flowers, the gentle sounds, and pleasant scents of the Abbey woods enfolding her spirit, as it went on its way, was not realized; but she had what was better—Mary Elton's tender sympathy and loving wisdom till the last. Will never forgot her last words, and the happy look that rested with him was his better angel through life, a safer guide than his passion for his cousin Eve had been, though that, probably, had been a premonitory grace, and served its purpose.

CHAPTER XII.

EVE THINKS A NEW WORLD AWAITS HER.

AFTER the concert Eve would willingly have followed her humble attendant to her own cab, and in the seclusion of her little apartment have tried to come to some understanding with herself concerning the strange and perverse feelings that had so suddenly subdued her. But San Serle, more profoundly enchanted than ever he had been, bore her away with him and Dinorah, as if she had made herself his lawful prey by translating his music for a world's delight.

"We are going to have them all for supper; we always do, to assure ourselves that we have done well; and how could we do so without our queen?" he asked, the glory of his own triumph still about him, and making him more than grand in Eve's sight.

"But you know I have not done well," she replied, with an unwonted sense of humility, and shrinking from the ordeal of such a critical assembly. "Let me go home; I cannot meet all those wonderful people to-night," she pleaded, as Serle led her to his carriage.

"Then you shall not meet them. I will send them all away except Bernard Fielding, and Dinorah will be glad to have him all to herself."

He waved his hand with an indolent air of benignity to his friends and admirers, saying, "We are exhausted; you had better come to us to-morrow."

Eve found that there is nothing so imperious as a gentle tyranny. Nevertheless Mr. Serle's critical acquaintance took a seat at the supper-table, with the urbane calm of some of those people who believe supremely in themselves.

Eve sat apart, silent and tragic-looking in her rich eastern robe. It seemed as if she could not divest herself of the sentiment that had governed her soul till the raiment had been put off. Not a shadow of the tragedy hung over Bernard. That exalted saintliness

of look that had been the *rôle* of the youthful priest-husband, and which had overcome Eve in her realization of the passionate, devoted wife, was there still; and had still the same strange power over her. She could not help looking at him with a sort of pitying reverence, and wondering why some people were born unto the priestly order, and had nothing to do with the storms and the fires that seemed to be more natural and human. Why should it signify to her? Ought she not to be glad that any one could be so perfect and so pure? And yet she shivered as if his cold purity had some withering effect upon her life. That feeling of bewildering dismay with which she had turned from him when, as her husband and the father of her little ones, he had sung his consent that she and they should go away from him for ever, because his priest had said it must be so, was fearfully real still; and she could not let the question rest—"Is a woman's love a wrong and a hindrance to a man's soul, that he must put it away in his highest moments?"

A plaintive remark from Mr. Serle broke the painful spell.

"We never know how great we are till we see ourselves reflected in a woman's mind. I scarcely knew myself to-night in Evalina's interpretation of me."

"It was certainly scarcely the translation I had been led to expect," the critical stranger remarked. "I never expected to find you, poet and universalist, weaving those hideous questions of female rights or wrongs into your æsthetic compositions."

"I never thought of such a thing either; and you did not soar high enough if you stopped at such a commonplace level; besides, Eve went beyond us all to-night, I fancy. Instead of simply mourning over her own loss and the desolation of her sisters in sorrow, her genius broke from all the trammels of my score, or the conventionalisms of our masters, and, as a new Fate, solved the question, for all women, by showing how nobly they can aspire, and how acutely they can feel," Serle exclaimed, with such an unusual influx of energy, that he drew his chair as close as possible to Eve's side as a grateful recognition of its source.

"I was more than satisfied Eva, darling,

with myself I mean, for I felt greater and more fruitful than I had hitherto believed."

"As many an author does, I have no doubt, when he sees himself interpreted by the critics. I often think how extremely uneasy the ghosts of Homer or Shakespeare must be by the load of extraordinary meaning they have been harnessed to. I should want to come back to settle it off with them, my unmerited honours would gall me so," said Bernard, as he walked quietly backwards and forwards through the large drawing-room.

Instead of drinking wine or eating stimulating dainties, or cultivating his sentiments, Bernard always walked off his fatigues or excitements, and so kept his enthusiasm high and pure.

The stranger stood in the doorway of the ante-room, about which he always hovered, because it was the scene of the supper-table. He had not spoken to Eve yet, for, like most very self-complacent and conceited people, he was shy before any assured talent. He was not sure that he ought to fall in with this general and extravagant admiration of a young artist, who was likely to be an innovation too. It was his forethought that had

opened to her mind the possible horrors of what he called stage-fright; and now he thought his critical profession demanded a knowledge of the true cause of Eve's innovation. He put his question in his most grandiloquent style, as if the young singer could not assimilate simple words without music. So she laughed and told him she knew nothing about her "soul's anatomy and its fine impulsions." She believed singers could feel very much like other women, though they were expected not to do, just because they were in the habit of expressing their feelings more intensely.

San Serle stroked his silky moustache tenderly, and gave utterance to a most significant ejaculation. He was evidently brooding over her remark, though he said absently, "You were not solving the great woman question then? I am glad of that at any rate. Dinorah knows that there is no difficulty at all. There is a sphere for every woman as soon as she can fill it in a seemly manner."

Dinorah responded from the soft folds of her queenly robe.

"But what of all our sisters, who can neither be beautiful nor create beauty for others, and who yet aspire?" asked Bernard.

"Can they not see and feel?" Eve exclaimed, rather hardly, Bernard thought; till she added, with a sensibility that seemed new to her character, "They have the beauty without the terrible cold pain."

Bernard turned quickly from the flower-wreaths, Eve's triumphant flowers, which he was helping Miss Serle to preserve, and questioned the beautiful speaker with his thoughtful, clear eyes. Whatever answer he thought he met in her glowing face was not recognized; but his look gave Eve a new impulse. She said with decision, but without any apparent passion, "Mr. Serle, I have spoiled your grand opera to-night. You all know I have spoiled it. I am very sorry, and I will never sing in an opera again."

"Child, what are you saying? You glorified my opera. I never knew what it was worth till you interpreted it for me. There never was any thing finer than your passion; nay, your inspiration raised to life and truth what had been merely passion and seeming."

"No, I rendered it absurd. You will see the critiques in the papers to-morrow, and you will find your beautiful opera ridiculed, and all through my silly mistake." Eve cast a furtive glance towards the great man, who was still surveying her as if she had been something he was to analyze for the public. "Those who don't like your new musical theories will be only too glad to turn your composition and my interpretation into ridicule, and they could not have a better reason, only they will be altogether mistaken; for no question of public rights or wrongs came into my head. It is not wise enough."

She gave a little defiant nod towards the supper-room, as if she would willingly send some missile of warning after the adverse critic, who was taking his final refreshment without compunction. He and Bernard then went away.

Eve knew she must stay all night, and Miss Serle, having only one spare room, had prepared it for her. She rose immediately, and kissed Dinorah with tender, lingering affection, for she always had found her gentle and kind; and it was hard to be separating

herself from the only refined and sympathetic friend. Eve was making an extraordinarily formal courtesy to Mr. Serle as her parting sign, when he caught her hand and said, "Why have you brought your fine stage manners into our drawing room, Eva? Have we offended you, my child?"

"Oh, no. I have told you. I am ashamed and sorry," she replied quietly.

"And I am proud and enchanted. I will write an opera every year if you will sing for me."

"I have told you the truth, Mr. Serle. I never mean to sing in an opera again. I am not fit for anything so grand."

"Dinny, what am I to do with her?" Serle asked pathetically.

"Let her go to bed. She is over-excited and weary," said Dinorah, in her commonplace wisdom. "You will be quite right in a week or two, dear," she added, stroking Eve's cheek with her soft fingers. "Young things have to go through strange perturbations; but they are only very silly little stars that get shaken quite out of their orbit."

"Of course Dinorah knows all about these little feminine trials, and see how fairly she has come through them all! Nothing does much good if it is not shaken sometimes—stirred to its very foundations, you know, darling, just that it may find out that it has foundations. But we will not preach any more," Serle said, with a tender reservation, as if he had been propounding moralities for an hour.

He rang the bell. "Dinorah's maid must help you disrobe, Eva. You will never evolve alone from this splendid architectural attire."

Always ready to laugh at San Serle's whims, Eve shook her head with her mirthful smile, and said she should be hopelessly entangled if any strange hand interfered, and she was gone before the summons was answered.

There were so many hard things to think about, so many strange questions to settle with herself, in spite of her quick wit and elastic spirit, poor Eve was overcome at last, and overcome by a power she had never calculated on—a noble instinct that made the hour of her richest triumph seem all wrong

and worthless. What a recoil was this ! All that she had lived and striven for so intensely, ambitions that had appeared so grand, and victories only attained by a few of the most gifted ones, stamped out at once by a conviction only a few hours old ! She could make nothing of it either ; but as she knelt down and covered her face with the silken eider quilt, and tried to understand why she was never to take that glorious *rôle* again, why, in the moment when all her efforts were crowned, the crown itself was a curse, she could only repeat, “ I will never sing in an opera again ! ” Her destiny was surely a very unreasonable one. She must give up every beautiful hope, even the fine perfectness she had attained, because of this secret something within her own nature, that was of itself more perfect still. It would not make her any happier though, for she had a great love for her profession, and an intrinsic regard for success ; and all the rich, glowing responses an artistic soul could make, her soul had made, as she had sung the music of the masters before those who could understand and feel. She wondered if any of the great

queens of harmony, whose names had been household words from her childhood, had ever been tried in this way; and if so, how they had managed themselves to accept their fair fate so proudly. Many of these names came into her mind; their inner history was hidden no doubt; but some shameful and some heroic things she knew of them, yet none resembled her trial, and she could not evade it.

“I shall just have to live with mamma and Mrs. Bray, and sing simple songs in third-rate concerts, and I hate such a life.”

Thinking of the contrast of her own little home, and the society she met there, with the refinement, and luxury, and fame she loved, was intolerable: there would be nothing to compensate; no work under the eye of any one who knew what excellence really was; no ardour, or ambition, or glory, or even affection; for Eve could not have more than the merest innate feeling for her vapid mother, whose soul seemed to have set at noon, leaving all the after-part of her long day in twilight. When quite tired with trying to see a brighter way through these diffi-

culties, she rose from her knees. Through all her young, strong life she had tried to guide her own spirit on its upward way. Another hand, not to be seen, but whose potent agency was making this wonderful light and trouble about her, might be recognized and blessed hereafter, but that time was not yet come.

The mirror on the dressing-table reflected a very splendid image, and, even in her misery, that reflection was pleasing, and distracted her heavy thoughts for a minute.

“It was just like Mr. Serle to bring me here dressed up in this way, and never thinking of how I am to get through the streets in daylight!” She smiled to herself at the absurdity. “I must get home without seeing them again, somehow; for I cannot be explaining my motives, and Bernard will be here for breakfast—cold, hard-hearted, proud Bernard, who looked into my eyes to-night with no more thought of me, Eve, than if I had been a brazen trumpet—who sang to me sweet, loving words as my very husband, and regarded me not at all. I was a singing-woman, an organ, nay, far worse! I was a

woman who might be looked at and sung to with all that passion of love and sorrow, and be left to my still, desolated self again! As if fire could not scorch, or lightning blight an actress!"

The truth was out now. Eve's mind had crystallized the fact at last; and she pressed her fingers over her eyes as if she would willingly blind herself again.

Dinorah's care had provided for the night; the dainty white cap and dress lay ready. Eve looked at her velvet robe, and all the starry and moonlike ornaments of gold with which she was invested, and then she put them off without any of the pride she was wont to feel, and she put the little close cap over her hair, and thought she would wear just such a one always, if certain contingents had been otherwise, very gladly.

"I thought I should be so gloriously happy when things came to exactly what they have become," was her idea as the gorgeous dress was tossed into a chair; "and now, how shall I get home," was the thought of the moment.

Miss Serle's servants were late risers; but as the breakfast hour was near mid-day there

would be time enough for one of them to fetch a cab, and she could get away unheard and unseen.

Such a complete revulsion of the life which had seemed hitherto the only good and pleasant one for her was sure to be a painful struggle. Coming, too, from herself in that unwarranted manner, so like an inspiration, with feeling and judgment to support it, the consequence appeared quite unassailable, and therefore very hard to bear. Setting aside the mystic shade her newly-discovered love for Bernard was throwing over her future, and which was too new to be realized, for a still profounder trouble, things looked black and blank enough. Any one who has the consciousness of some rare power, who has believed it to be the sole good and noble purpose to be lived up to, who has found the highest satisfaction, even a rapturous delight in the exercise of this power, and who has all at once, either by some infirmity or a clearer revelation, found it baseless and destroyed, can sympathize with Eve in her intense grief over this loss and change. Hers was no soft, weeping nature either; she could not go and

mourn over herself, and make others miserable and accountable. Life was worth having, worth all the more now that a great, holy insight had been given. There was, at any rate, something to help her to be resigned. So thinking, and wearied out at last, Eve fell asleep; but the first sound of movement in the house was sufficient to bring back the sense of her new and sorrowful designs.

Covering as much of her rich, luminous dress as possible, with one of Miss Serle's shawls, Eve ran quickly down the stairs to the drawing-room landing, and was passing the door when further progress was stayed; apparently the long robe had caught upon some portion of the banisters. Turning to disengage herself, a determined hand was laid on her arm, and she was drawn into the room.

"Evalina, I was afraid you might act in this foolish way, you looked so prophetic last night, and I have been sitting in that easy chair all the time lest I should miss you. Did you ever sit up for any one till you and the chair became, as it were, one painful identity? Now tell me why you are leaving

me and Dinorah in this surreptitious way? I should be angry were I not too tired and sorry," Mr. Serle said, looking as if he had real reason for being tired and sorry.

Since she had been her own mistress, Eve had given up her old habit of strenuous defiance, and her present trouble softened still more the manner of her reply. Besides, she had become attached to the Serles, and the necessity of leaving them was a great addition to the present distress. She replied quite gently, "I was afraid of being prevented and talked to, and you know I must go home, and never come here again."

"But what is the matter? Surely the child is infatuated, and cannot distinguish between our actual life and the ideal life of her music. You are surely not afraid of me?"

"No; I am not afraid;" her eye lighted with a smile as it glanced at the delicately refined face and form; "I am not afraid of anything but being persuaded when I know a thing must not be; and I don't see how to make you understand."

"Well, try. In the first place have you any particular dislike to me or Dinorah?"

"On the contrary, I love Miss Serle, and rather like you."

"Do you not love me, Eva?" This was said with Serle's most innocent complacency, and as if Eve's candour must meet his own.

"A little bit sometimes. I should love you very much, as I do your sister, if you never talked nonsense to me. But what does it signify when one's mind is so filled with great matters!"

It was Serle's turn to smile satirically now, but being in a paternal mood, and seeing how pale and dejected Eve was, he asked for a reasonable explanation of her annoyance. Experience had convinced her of his kind heart and discreet sympathy when fully trusted, and she determined to trust him now; so she said ingenuously, "While singing last night I made a great error in the principal scene; you know all about it; your great work was ruined, and by me. People think I was panic-stricken: you are kind, and say it is no matter. Whatever it may be, I can never go through anything of the sort again, and I have quite made up my mind that I never will. I

must keep to common concerts and simple songs."

"And profane the noblest powers, imagination, and feeling that amount to inspiration. That shall never be. I am satisfied, and claim you as my interpreter. Your experience last night will probably be unique. People do not go through those intense moments of enlightenment twice. Every passion has its one grand throe, and now yours is past, and you will be safe."

"Oh, what am I to do to make you understand? You are altogether mistaken. I think Miss Serle would understand me. There are some things men never can see," said Eve, anxious to exonerate herself in the sight of her friend, yet feeling more than ever the righteousness of her decision, and the difficulty of explanation. "It was no panic that came upon me, but a strange and terrible revelation that rose up at once, as if my soul had spoken with its one true master."

"Well, dear, and what was the revelation?"

"You see, Mr. Serle,"—Eve began quietly, but warming and flushing as she proceeded—

“we singing women have to cultivate every sense; we have to make ourselves beautiful by all means, and we must learn how to feel the most intensely what is beautiful and good, and then to put it into our very souls, to kindle and glow till it lives and shines before the world; and yet the clear crystal urn is not to be stained or even touched by the quickening fire. Every time we sing we are like flowers opening their inmost heart to the sunshine, and the rays go in and warm and sweeten every little nook till all is colour, and bliss, and glow.”

Again the difficulty of being fully explicit made Eve pause, and her lovely face, in her slightly confused enthusiasm, was particularly interesting to San Serle. He felt as if his plastic youth was in full force again; and even his countenance reflected the sensibility that was moving hers. Again he gave the encouraging note, “Well, dear?”

“Then all at once we find we are not these calm, receptive flowers, but women, and with every feeling and hue of life crushed in our hearts, or world-shamed.”

“I cannot follow the argument to its

result," said Serle, deliberating in tone, but with a belying sparkle in his eye. "Whence do the flowers get this fair wisdom? There must be a whisper or sign made from without. Nothing evolves spontaneously, not even women."

Eve perceived now that she was not definite enough, and was getting into further trouble, as well as leading Mr. Serle thither. Though at another time she might not have objected to tease him by drawing out his vanity, and as capriciously suppressing him, she was suffering too much to be indifferent to another's feelings just now; yet she was no readier to confess that her love had been won in an irregular fashion than the most fastidious maiden would have been. She was still enveloped in Miss Serle's large shawl, so he was obliged to regard her simply as a lay figure.

"I hear Dinorah stirring. She is aware something very unusual is at large, nothing less than her brother's destiny."

Eve made a sign of utter rejection. "I have always thought explanations and understandings the most overwhelming states to

get into. We will stop now, if you please, before we are quite lost. You must let me go, and believe in me this one time. I am sure my mind is made up, and for the right, so it must be as I say, though I am very, very sorry. I had better go before Miss Serle comes ; it will save trouble."

"Stay a few moments. I am not like you, Evalina ; I like explanations and understandings. You have said that as you sang last night a strange revelation was made to you. It was as though its one true master had spoken with your soul. Do not turn away. Don't coquet with a man's life, for it is life to me, though a younger and more energetic fellow might get through without having his one sole wish granted."

However he might like explanations, Serle appeared to find them as difficult to overcome as Eve had found them. His pale, delicate face showed the stress of his soul ; and no one would have deemed him one of the most self-complacent and, consequently, the happiest of men.

Eve stretched her hand towards him with intent to arrest further mischief, but he caught the little signal as if it had been one

of safety instead of warning, and it gave him confidence to proceed.

"Was I that potent master, Evalina?"

"Why, Mr. Serle, you did not sing with me last night."

The next moment Eve perceived how much she had admitted. In the old time (she seemed to have lived a decade in the last twelve hours) she would have laughed merrily at the idea of being betrayed in this wily manner. Her new insight had tempered her spirit as well as opened her heart. "Let it go," thought she, as her hand was freed from Serle's loosening clasp; "I shall only get deeper in if I struggle any more."

There was no opportunity for further struggle. Mr. Serle met her startled eye with a wise and pitying gaze.

"I see now, I see it all, and I wish I did not," he remarked, slowly stroking his moustache, his habit when his mood was sympathetic. Was he pitying himself or Eve?

"You will be kind still, you will not betray me?" she asked.

"Poor little Eva! Now, before Dinorah comes, we will send for a coach, and you you shall go to your mother."

CHAPTER XIII.

A LADY'S PROPOSAL.

IT is to be hoped few people feel so dreary about going home as Mr. Forrest felt after that trial. Yet the great dread which had haunted his way and broken his rest for some time had apparently been tided over. He had gone through about as much self-depreciation as he could bear, he thought, and as much odious publicity; and for several hours his ears had attuned every half-heard sentence from his fellow-creatures to a charge against his character, while his shoulders had been suspiciously sensitive, as if each eager neighbour had wielded a staff of sinister meaning. Now he was free and independent, and no felon—free to go and come whither he would, and to indict any evil tongue that might assoil his name; yet

he was depressed in mind and disaffected towards every being—especially himself. There was nothing to be feared and nothing to be hoped for : a flat, disheartening state of things far more difficult to bear than positive peril. Mr. Forrest's mind had always been one easily influenced—even his conscience could take its cue very much from the opinion others entertained of him ; and he knew he had left the court strangely stigmatized : he had been submitted to a degrading cross-examination, and there was more than a taint upon his honour. He had asked Mr. Cameron to share his gig as far as Wyckam, and added the offer of a bed, that there need be no rousing of the old lady at home ; but Mr. Cameron had declined his courtesies with less grace than usual. Forrest wanted that lonely drive with his old friend very much ; and if George had not been so stiff-tempered, so fearful of seeming to require a favour or put himself in the way of confidences, some good might have ensued to both men. Every one is responsible more or less for the happy or evil conduct of another ; and a proud, reserved man, especially if he have claim to

some special talent, is accountable for much of the folly that creeps by him.

When, therefore, the kindly and familiar, though rather highly animated countenance of Lucy Lawson smiled upon Forrest as he left the Assize Court, it was no great wonder if he felt moved to say, "There's room in the gig, Lucy, and room in the house at Wyckam, and perhaps you are as much needed there as anywhere."

No wonder if he spoke with a little more warmth of welcome than he had ever spoken with before; for there was no doubt of her friendliness or admiration as she took her place beside him.

It was a crisp, spring night; the air was cutting and clear, and Lucy was not prepared for a long, cold drive; but she bore the discomfort with pride, for there was nothing she liked so well as her Cousin Fred's society; and for a year or two he had not vouchsafed her much of his companionship. Her cheeks glowed in the wind's despite and her eyes shone brilliantly through her white veil. Lucy was making up her mind to "strike while the iron was hot," as she inwardly ex-

pressed the bold venture upon which her soul was set. This was certainly no bashful maiden, and the two had been intimate for twenty years, yet her heart would throb so violently whenever the grand starting-point was approached, several miles of the road were passed in silence or idle chat. When the highway was left and they were shut in by the high hedges of the by-lanes, with the moon at their back, there existed such a sense of aloneness between them she took courage, and asked, in rather a flippant tone, if he were getting over his disappointment pretty well.

"Which disappointment?" he asked: "I have had so many."

"This last one, which I fancy is the only one you did not make for yourself."

"I thought I was even more guilty in this matter than in any other: I am sure Cameron thinks so."

"But how did Mary Elton take your communication?"

"With quite as much composure as I made it."

Lucy turned a questioning glance towards

his face ; but the obscurity made it impossible to see what he meant.

“ Mary is rather too self-possessed and perfect for you, Fred. I don’t believe she would have made you happy,” she said.

“ At any rate, I thought she would make me happier, or I should not have attempted to make a villain of myself for her sake. Do you know, I never realized my conduct till Mary looked me in the face after I had told her how I had fettered myself in my young days. It was the sort of look the creatures have when, sorely bestead, they turn their piteous eyes to us for alleviation. I really think she hoped I had told her a lie, or would perjure myself again. I have detested myself ever since.”

“ You think she does love you, then—or did ?” Lucy asked, in a discontented tone.

“ That’s a queer question to ask a man—especially for you to ask,” Forrest replied, with a short laugh, and lashing his horse impatiently.

“ And yet she could give you up so quietly ! I know she did give you up the instant you told her about Sophy Fletcher ; and she had

not resigned you before, but had stuck to you—like one of those creatures that stick to rocks, you know—through all your caprices, previously. Now, I could not bear caprice from any man I was engaged to; but I do think I should be faithful in a real case of trouble.”

Lucy had broken the ice for Fred now, and he might drink of the waters of her consolation deeply, if he would.

“But this was not a case of real trouble; it was more a case of rascality. A girl like Mary Elton is not likely to love a man through any moral smut,” he replied, with a man’s perversity.

“You told her everything, then?”

“Pretty nearly everything, I should think. I met her on purpose.”

“Did you tell her about Eve? Come, Fred, you don’t often require to be pumped in this way. What did Mary say about Eve?”

“Something that had never occurred to my mind before. I think she was pitying Eve more than herself just then. She asked what I was going to do for Eve, now that I had made myself responsible for her poor, shamed existence. I told her she had not

been left without education, or a means of supporting herself creditably, when she interrupted, with a shade of scorn in her voice, 'Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Cameron, I suppose.' Then she explained that that was not all which had to be done: I was responsible for a life that had to develop itself without any of the home sanctities or immediate providences that are so necessary for a young life; that, instead of these, I had even prepared a way full of temptations and horrors, which the education I talked about would make all the more dreadful and imminent. It is all true; but I had never thought of it in this way." Forrest spoke slowly, partly recollecting Mary's words, but filling up from his newly-aroused imagination.

"It must have sounded very much as if Miss Mary had taken holy orders," said Lucy, laughing. "Did she not ask you concerning your responsibilities to Mistress Sophy Jones? I should have thought that matter would have interested her the most."

"Lucy, it is your province and privilege to look handsome and sing, but not to be sarcastic. Don't sneer at poor little Mary," Forrest



remarked, from the old heights of self-complacency. "I only wish I had had a sister like her."

Miss Lawson, who was good-tempered, especially when she had a purpose at heart, replied, with candid amiability, "Seriously though, Fred, what shall you do with Sophy? She will be free again, now that her captain is done away with, and she may claim a return to her first coverture. Those weak, whining women are the hardest things in the world to shake off; they are like spaniels, you know. Then I was watching her brother Dan after that little exposure you almost made in the witness-box. He had got hold of an idea and was working at it with all his might. He will let nothing escape his hate now, and I should not wonder if he makes Sophy tell everything."

Mr. Forrest got out of his gig to open a gate, giving his cousin the reins. They were in the Fen Lanes, passing very near the house recently occupied by this poor Sophy. It looked lonely and dreary, standing in the moonshine, and seemed a fit abode for sinister and lawless scheming, or more than mere

patient endurance. The fact that a faded opera-singer would suffer herself to be buried alive there and make no sign, was an earnest she was not likely to betray a trust.

Impressed with some idea of this kind, he remarked, as he put the carriage-rug more carefully over the lightly-clad Lucy, "There is one quality you women possess when you have really loved which, somehow, you rarely accredit each other with, and that is fidelity. No matter whether your word or honour be pledged or not, there is some impulse that makes you secret and trusty. I know you don't object to being consoled in various ways according to your fancies, and some will betray themselves as well as their lovers out of sheer spite; but supposing you are not given to malice, but are just ordinary, soft-hearted, loving women, you will bear no end from a man sooner than bring him into trouble. Besides, Sophy and I understand each other pretty well. It has all been talked over many times; she knows she could never have taken her place as mistress of Wyckam—she said so—knowing my mother so well; and I did her no wrong."



Weak, but not wary, Forrest spoke as he believed. He had always thought it had been very hard upon him to have fallen in love so young with this pretty singing woman, and had congratulated himself on his chivalrous sense of honour because he had made her his wife. He had never repented in his heart of this tardy concession, though it had hampered and tinged his life with such unhealthy intensity. Still the yoke had never been sufferable; and as Sophy had preferred a career in London to something worse than oblivion at Wyckam Hall, she had fallen in with Fred Forrest's arrangement that their marriage should be suppressed; he undertaking to keep her from indigence, and she promising never to betray. Afterwards, when the bright London life had come to an end and Eve had to be educated, and he had grown tired of his bachelor existence, he had even induced her to marry Captain Jones, convincing himself by several sophisms that there was no legal bondage to be broken through. Lucy Lawson had been the sole confident of his youthful passion and its consequences, and she had encouraged him

in the belief that the marriage, being contracted by a minor and in some out-of-the-way foreign chapel, could have no claims upon either of them if they agreed to break away. Eve had been their great difficulty, of course she could not be assimilated, and was too ardent and demonstrative an individual to be the suppressed child of such a mother. Eve rebelled against the captain systematically, as if divining something wrong, insisted upon having a proper training and career of her own, and was so astonished and non-suited when her mother, recovering from her fearful illness, had not recovered her beauty and vocal powers, that it was evident something must be done with her. The idea of going to study under Mr. Cameron had originated in Eve's own mind; Sophy had gladly seconded her desire, and Mr. Forrest had acquiesced after the child had made her singular introduction into the Camerons' household. Then Sophy had married her captain in peace, and he, in accordance with his peculiar tastes and avocations, had chosen to inhabit the Fen Lanes' house; bringing this sin, and possible retribution, to the very

gates of Wyckam, and Forrest feeling a sort of morbid satisfaction in having it so.

Notwithstanding all this, Forrest meant to marry; he meant to mend and sweeten the life he had so maimed and sullied, in the only way he thought possible, by allying therewith some pure and noble one. The persistent wrong in his character asserted itself all the time, making him selfishly indifferent to the injustice and injury to be done to his pure and noble one.

Lucy Lawson had loved him well enough—quite as well as he deserved to be loved—and would willingly have condoned the past mistakes if he had thought she possessed the power: but the expiation required a lamb without spot. Then Mary Elton's fine nature and sweetness touched his heart, but his conscience too, and made him capricious and fitful; and then Cameron's interference and that detestable slander filled his soul with shame and dread.

Lucy had not brought her purpose to its end yet, and she meant to come to some result before they drove into the court-yard at Wyckam. Practice had enabled her to turn

her thoughts over pretty quickly in certain directions. Mr. Forrest had told her of his intention to go abroad as soon as he was at liberty; and since his alienation from Miss Elton was completed her ancient flame, as some phase of love is aptly styled, had re-kindled itself with uncomfortable ardour, and she could not suffer him to go without a test at least, whatever it might cost her. Still her heart throbbed in such a hard, metallic manner, and her voice seemed so unnaturally remote, she felt as if some occult power had got command of her and was making her speak, whether she would or not, as she asked, "I suppose you will not want me at Wyckam for long, Fred? When do you start for the continent?"

"As soon as you can get me ready, Lucy; the sooner the better."

"But, Fred, don't you mean to take any steps to get that marriage properly set aside? It will be no secret now, and you would feel so much more free and comfortable if it were legally settled."

"Should I? Perhaps; if it could be done quietly; but then nothing is done quietly."

We must make the public fully acquainted with all our feelings as well as affairs, and I would rather not."

"Then do you mean to take Sophy with you?"

There was a volume of significant insinuation in this little question that did more credit to Lucy's ingenuity than to her good taste; and Forrest asked her what she meant, with more irritation than she thought he could have exhibited to her. It was necessary to explain meekly.

"Well, you know, she may come back into this neighbourhood and make a full exposure, incited by her brother, and it would not be nice if you were out of the way and could not defend yourself. I think, if I were you, I would put the affair into a lawyer's keeping. They cannot make out anything against you—it was Captain Jones who was guilty of bigamy; and that does not signify to him now."

If the moon had been shining on Forrest's face instead of on his broad-cloth, Lucy might have seen a peculiar smile playing about his mouth. It was half an amused and half a

pitying smile, for he was beginning to divine his cousin's meaning and was sorry for her, and for himself; and yet his temperament was too facile and Epicurean to see only the melancholy aspect of things for long at a time.

"A few more shots at a winged bird!" exclaimed he, the smile developing into a short laugh. "Only a matter of taste—certainly not of conscience, Lucy! But don't you see the gracious public would immediately place the sin and infamy on the right shoulders. The captain might have committed his bigamy unwittingly, he will not be here to say he did; but I shall—and what does that proceeding make of me?"

"Oh, dear, what a poor timid way men have of getting through their difficulties! I suppose it is because their minds, being so logical, take in evil consequences as the result of being at all. I am glad I am a woman. Why, Fred, so sure am I that you would come out clean, I would marry you to-morrow and take the consequences, nothing fearing!"

Forrest laughed now till the Wyckam villagers, as they lay in their rustic beds,

must have wondered what had betaken the squire to be so regardless of their more decorous habits.

“Well done, Cousin Lucy!” he cried, as he whirled his gig through his court doors, his tone and laughter disconcerting her very much. “I will admit there is some of the stuff of which heroes are made in your soul, and next to having my own choice, I would be chosen in this honest and thorough-going way!”

He felt how her hand trembled as he helped her to alight, and he saw a something glittering on her blooming cheek as she stood in the moonlight. Such regard and sympathy could not be very ungrateful to him just then.

Poor Lucy was glad of the usual cousinly kiss, though if she could have interpreted his after-thoughts she might perhaps have been disenchanted.

“As a man sows even so he must reap,”—he repeated to himself, as he left the horse with his servant and walked rapidly through the Wyckam fields to Framborough.

CHAPTER XIV.

SAFE AT LAST.

MRS. CAMERON, believing in the good effect of friendly presences in trying situations, had been very reluctant to admit that she would be better at home than sitting, cold and tired, in the Assize Court. She had spent a long, lonely day, vexed with herself because she could not go on with what seemed to be her duty, but must give in to indolent indulgence when she might have been assisting a fellow-creature who had got into trouble; inveighing against herself because she could not go on to the end erect and strong, but must even lower her flag and succumb with the weakest of her sex. Mrs. Poole and Mrs. Elton had called in the afternoon with the kindly intention of helping on the long evening with a hand at

whist, but the irritable old lady had received their proposal so ungraciously, and had knitted so vigorously, they had felt unwelcome, and left her to wait in her loneliness. By tea-time she was so tired of the monotony of her bedroom she managed to get downstairs, for company's sake, though there was no one but the old cat to receive her.

A long life filled with active usefulness can scarcely supply a proximate cause of patience and quiescence when age comes with its enforced abstractions. By ten o'clock Mrs. Cameron was convinced no woman ought to assume that she was all-sufficing for her own soul's claims; but should receive gratefully any little charitable aids in supporting the paradoxical burdens of the grasshoppers.

The door, never locked when George was expected, opened in the abrupt way usual to things under his hand, soon afterwards, and then the weariness was dispelled. There was much to interest, the hungry traveller's supper had to be prepared, and then the particulars of the trial and Forrest's deportment therein were expected.

"I hope there's no harm come to Fred; you don't speak out about him," she remarked, after two or three attempts to get at the facts of the day that concerned her the most.

"You had better wait till to-morrow, mother; there's nothing very pleasant to tell—besides, I want to smoke, and that will set you coughing."

She took a keen look at his face; he meant to be considerate, for he looked kindly at her, though his words seemed selfish.

"Is he come home, safe and sound?"

"I expect so; he offered me a seat in his gig four hours ago, but as I preferred walking he kept ahead of me, most likely."

"You preferred walking twelve miles alone, George! That sounds badly for Forrest, or fastidious in you."

Mrs. Cameron lighted the pipe of peace and sat down, waiting till he might choose to explain further under its inspiration.

"The journey was too much for Kitty Fletcher; we had to leave her behind—to die, I expect," he said.

"To die in a strange place! Poor child!

I hope her queer father will be good to her. Will she get all she needs, George?"

"Miss Elton is staying with her, so you may be satisfied she will want for nothing."

There was such a long silence, Mrs. Cameron feared she must go to bed in her unsatisfied ignorance.

"We should get on much better if the knaves and fools could be welded; they divide the world strangely between them, and leave but a small chance for those that mean well," Mr. Cameron said, speaking from his involved recollections. "Had you any idea that Fred Forrest was a bigamist, mother?"

While Mrs. Cameron was lost in wonder at such a strange question, he enlarged his meaning: "I mean in intention; engaging himself to one woman while he was married to another?"

"Why Fred was never married at all! You are deluding yourself, George Cameron."

"Did you fasten the door after me? There's some one come in," he exclaimed, rising quickly and striding into the hall with no hospitable grace. He re-entered instantly with Mr. Forrest.

"I am an unseasonable visitor, and must ask your pardon, and your patience for an hour, late as it is," said he, the instant he appeared, and with a singular lack of the courtesy that seemed a part of himself. He was looking, too, so nerved for desperate issues his friends were more likely to be alarmed than patient.

They were not kept waiting long. Standing by the table, with his hat in his hand, and speaking very rapidly, he said, "I did not expect to find you still down stairs, dear madam; it is your son's advice that is needed just now."

Mrs. Cameron rose with a stately intention of withdrawing, but he did not mean that she should go, he said; and was glad if she would hear of his folly from his own lips; and, for the old friendship's sake, judge as mercifully as she could.

"I hope there is nothing worse than folly to tell of; and yet an endless chain of tomfooleries, pure and simple, is about as provoking a matter as can be; especially where there are both wit and breeding, Frederick Forrest," she remarked, those

intensive grey eyes of hers causing his to seek something less reproachful to steady his own upon.

“There is something worse than folly, but I am afraid it will be none the easier to hear or tell. However, I came to tell it. I married Sophy Fletcher in the cathedral of Rouen.”

Forrest took advantage of the mute surprise that followed this most startling announcement to explain. “I am not quite sure, and never cared to be, whether or not I looked upon this as a *bond fide* marriage. It satisfied my conscience then, and something more. There was such a wonderful grandeur, and yet so much simplicity, about the church and its services, and Sophy sang so finely in its choir, a strange, inexpressible influence beset me—from the tender glory of the morning, or the poetical aspects of the place, or the sympathies that flow so irresistibly from or through our humanity, now and then. I cannot explain—indeed I forget now—what the dominant cause was; but I felt as if I must make my retributive sacrifice there and then.”

"Well, sir, and having made your retributive sacrifice, for the sake of all these fine things, what extraordinary reverses suppressed you and destroyed your conscience again?"

Mrs. Cameron's tone and look were so withering when she was moved to anger, even George felt for her victim.

"Don't be hard, mother, and then have to repent, as the custom is with you women," he protested, uncertain where to let the weight of his feeling fall. "I have heard you say it was a pity Eve could not claim her father."

"Let her be angry with me, Cameron; no one else cares enough about me. I have felt no such wholesome influence since my mother left me."

This sentiment on the part of Mr. Forrest recalled Cameron to the point at issue; and he asked, in his sarcastic manner, if he were going to attest his marriage now, his wife being left on his hands.

Though shrinking visibly from his own task, Forrest said, without hesitation, "I came to ask you to assist me in setting this

marriage aside, believing in your sense of justice."

There was a banning light in Mrs. Cameron's eyes as, rising with the vigour of her best days and placing herself firmly before George, lest his misogynistic bearings should betray him, she exclaimed, "Are you asking George Cameron to help you to bring our Eve to infamy? No son of mine shall ever help to blast an innocent young life while I am in the world to hinder!" Her high voice quivered as she added, "I am ashamed for you, Frederick Forrest!"

Knowing himself too well to resent this outburst of indignation, he tried to explain his position.

"I don't think you understand me, madam. Sophy would be far from wishing me to certify this marriage now. She never cared for the sacrifice on my part, being quite satisfied with the arrangements made for her. She preferred her own profession then; and now, you are aware, such a declaration would be a conviction of bigamy."

He took no notice of Cameron's abrupt

question, "Bigamy, at whose responsibility?" but proceeded gently.

"I have thought of Eve, and am assured she is far happier as she is, than she would ever be under the restraints of a more stringent society."

"I did not know that happiness was the purpose and end of our existence. Perhaps exceptional beings have peculiar destinies. Besides, how long will such highly-seasoned happiness last? How long did it last in her mother's case?" Mrs. Cameron asked, warmly adding, with more regret than anger in her tone, "You can answer for its evanescence, and let us trust you have also felt some of its stings."

"The profession is honourable, mother; and Eve is successful and distinguished already. We need not raise any false quibbles," said Cameron, never tolerant of an aspersion on his music.

"If Bernard Fielding has not been misinformed—and he had the news from Mr. Serle—Eve has raised her own quibbles; she has retired from the stage, and means to sing no more, except mere concert songs.

Bernard told me yesterday ; and he and Mr. Serle are satisfied about her motive, though I don't think they understand what it is. I don't think we ever understood Eve ; Bernard says she is a noble girl. I don't believe in noble girls, but I think Providence has its paradoxes, and sets them before us now and then—perhaps to keep the balance even.” When very much put out Mrs. Cameron was not very particular in what direction her satire struck, while her rapid flow of words left little space for interruption.

The two men heard this news of Eve's strange resolution with different feelings. Mr. Cameron did not regard the matter as of much importance. “I daresay it is only a whim,” he remarked. “Women are full of fancies. They would never keep their lives sweet and wholesome without these shifting winds.”

“Bernard may be mistaken,” said Forrest. “It would be wrong and foolish to give up, now that so much is assured. Indeed I should not like to think of Eve struggling amongst a set of third-rate performers. Every profession has its grades. Perhaps it

will be better for me to see Bernard Fielding to-morrow, before I make out my plans." He looked at Mrs. Cameron, as if for advice.

"Why not see Eve herself? If her life is not sweet and clean, it is not altogether her fault; but, indeed, I have known lightsome little feet go cleanly where weightier ones have sunk in the mire."

Whatever motive the right-minded, though somewhat stern, old lady had in making this suggestion, she was glad that her son supported it and that Forrest seemed disposed to listen.

He would think about it; at any rate, he would defer his intended appeal for the dissolution of his unfortunate marriage until he knew more about Eve.

Mr. Cameron asked him, in a very unamiable manner, why he was so anxious to free himself now, when he had passively endured the yoke for so many years and had even thought of superimposing another.

"I wish to marry again," said Forrest, bravely meeting the question; "and I don't see why I should not, if any one agrees with me in the matter."

Cameron's countenance fell, and his spirit too, apparently. "Of course it is no business of mine; tastes differ, that's all." He looked as if wondering why their untimely visitor did not go away, and told his mother it was time she went to bed.

Mr. Forrest could not linger after that. As soon as the door was closed upon him, Mrs. Cameron remarked, in a tone at variance with her harsh words, "George, you are as great a fool as ever."

"Very likely; but why at this moment must you tell me so?"

"Why could you not make him explain himself? I don't believe it is Mary Elton he is thinking about at all. He has not been with her for a long time, and he is too volatile to be attached to an idea."

"She went to the assizes in Miss Lawson's pony-carriage, and he may have been staying in the same house for any thing we know. At any rate, you are mistaken; he has been with her. It came out in evidence that they have been meeting in the old abbey. However, I don't see that his leavings or his choosings are any thing to us, mother."

Mrs. Cameron looked surprised and vexed. "Mary must be warned; she must be told all about this marrying business. She might have overlooked his former follies, she is just the girl to take a man for better or for worse, while there was a chance for believing there was nothing worse—but she would not let him commit an absolute wrong for her sake. She must be told in time."

"I shall tell her nothing." This was said in a way which meant absolute resolve through any fate.

"Then I shall. You said you left Mary nursing Kitty Fletcher. Have they room for me for a night in their lodgings?"

"I should think not. It is a poor little place."

"It is dreary work, watching by a dying bed. I shall go and see for myself if there be any hope of getting Kitty home."

However cogent her reasons and strong her resolutions, Mrs. Cameron was not able to abide by them. Most unwillingly, and with many murmurings against the inevitable,—not the great and just abstraction, her piety was too innate for that, but

against her particular exemplification of the inevitable—the poor old lady had to suffer for the excitement of that midnight quarrel with her young Cousin Forrest, as, according to her old-fashioned courtesy, she styled the master of Wyckam. Many times she tried to persuade George to go to Mary Elton and, for her sake, as much as their own, to warn her of the extreme duplicity of her faithless lover, asserting that if a marriage between them were to take place the sin would lie at his gate. “For, after all,” said she, “people are responsible according to the manner in which the Divine rays reach them; and Fred’s mother was such an interposing providence, Heaven’s lights were all refracted by her before they could touch her son. She forgot that she must leave him, all dazzled and bewildered, some time. Now you have had a will and a way of your own ever since you could take them, and I don’t believe you were ever taken un-awares; therefore, you are a very responsible person.”

“Yes, I was once, when I threw myself between an angry man’s uplifted hand

and his doomed wife. I struck his arm so that he received his own blow, and his disappointed victim flew at me like a fury for my interference. I don't wish to repeat this mistake," Cameron replied shortly, turning away.

He was sure if he were to go and declare to a girl that her beloved one was base, she would be indignant, especially if she had reason to believe the defamer had certain aims and desires of his own to make good thereby.

Perhaps nothing could have been better for Mary in those early days of her disenchantment—not only with Forrest, all mankind suffered defloration through his error—than watching by the meek and grateful Kitty. Hers had been such a poor little life in outward seeming; there had been no flowers in her spring, no fresh breezes, or gentle showers, or sunny beams; and yet it was worthy of being rounded off with death. Kitty seemed to be aware of these privations as she lay watching Mary's noble face, that was showing its harvest of her soul's joys and sorrows

now that she had realized all and had only to make up her mind in patience.

Two or three times Kitty wondered how it would be with her, she had lived and thought so little; for though she knew the Bible almost by heart, and of course had tried to comfort herself with the assurance that the kingdom of Heaven is of such as are childlike, Kitty knew that hers was no child's soul, with its trust too perfect even for wonder, and its love too pure to think of any return.

Harry was a most gracious little ministrant to her in those solemn days; perhaps no priest could have come so near. His weird young spirit must have gone through some strange rarefactions in the course of its evolvment, which must have been very surprising to Mary, who probably felt half frightened at the result of any interference in the work of his education.

Harry seemed to have found his congenial atmosphere in the border-land about which Kitty's soul was hovering, and he looked and talked as if he were the familiar of things that are scarcely of earth, and certainly

not yet of Heaven; his imagination being on the stretch all the time, while his anxiety to hear the voice that should call away poor Kitty was very urgent. She, who had never known children, believed in him as a type of them all; and so believing, life did not appear so very exacting and disappointing.

During the week that Kitty lived Mr. Cameron went three times to see how they were; spending a few hours in quiet attendance, so as to relieve Mary, and then walking thoughtfully home at night. No doubt he took cool counsel with himself in those long, silent walks, but he always found a necessity for the sympathetic violono on his return home.

His mother, knowing of these visits, and all the pain they must keep quick in his patient, waiting heart, and reverencing his great, self-repressing nature, was an anxious listener for his return, and then for the revelation that would only come through the medium of music. She knew his mood through this interpreter as well as if he had told her. There was not any hope yet, but there was not absolute despair. Beethoven's

grand, steady soul was his principal resource in those feverish days, and it was a great help to his own troubled and tempted soul. Over the Master's great works he sat for hours, infusing his own mood, sternly sad, or defiant, or aspiring, and in perfect concert weaving the mystical marriage, which must be wherever there is the fellowship of genius. No man would seek to enter his heaven by maligning another, after such communion, he knew well, and Mrs. Cameron was bound to the same opinion, however unwittingly. But that no man need peke and pine, even for the sake of the very maiden he thinks supreme, if he has a fair amount of worldly wit, was her more willing commentary.

Kitty was called at last; and was buried in the city churchyard, to little Harry's unbounded amazement and concern. He had been so certain of a bodily translation, had watched with such zealous faith for the winged messengers, he was grieved and indignant beyond measure at the material interference usurping the final charge. Fortunately Mr. Cameron was at hand to lighten up some of these obscure matters, or Harry's

zeal might have been as inconvenient, if not as cruel, as zeal without knowledge has so often been. For Harry believed in Mr. Cameron with the intuitive faith a young soul has, by wise and tender arrangement, for any one who is not false, in order that the higher faith may be born and nursed. He believed in him in spite of his uncomfortable habit of growling and nipping at him with set teeth, as he always did whenever he chanced to be near young things.

When there was nothing more to be done for Kitty, Mr. Cameron drove Mary and Harry home in an open carriage one sweet spring morning. The child insisted upon standing up before them and leaning over the splash-board, having an imaginary hold of the reins and a general guidance of the whole concern. Being very much absorbed in this business, he was impelled from time to time to turn his attention towards his two friends to assure himself that they had not slipped away out of his keeping. Once he said, with the most perfect solemnity, "Mamie, you and Mr. Cameron are the calf and the lion, and I am the little child that leads you."

Sitting by the side of the one who seemed to him to be every thing, and almost the only thing, that was good and pleasant of woman-kind, with the soft, tender heavens enfolding them, and all around the nature that was renewing and fulfilling the fairest and divinest purposes, it was not wonderful if even Mr. Cameron felt inspired and hopeful. He had certainly passed the high-day of love, when, so far as the lover is concerned, the rare forces of the universe are quite beside the mark, if he is not mated according to his desire, for he felt as if nature herself were his partisan, and must be charming the soul of the little silent maiden who knew how much he cared. Still he could not speak for himself again. The chivalrous, refraining sentiment that had grown so strong in his lonely, restricted existence, fettered him so completely he fancied nothing short of a sort of miraculous intervention could bring about the relation he only cared to live for.

How could Mary, just having escaped from the subtle, faithless fascination of Frederick Forrest, help feeling a certain safe strength and an assured blissfulness in the atmosphere

of an affection so genuine and patient? Guessing that Cameron knew pretty well all about the shameful involvements and deceptions of Forrest's career, she longed to speak to him of the confession that had been made only just in time to save her from the shock that might have come in the public court. It was not likely that a new love could spring suddenly into full life from the warm ashes of the old; and since this disenchantment Mary had felt the peculiar and painful nature of her home bondage more heavily. Even if she could leave her father to the guardianship of his wife, she could never leave little Harry to find out for himself, and alone, that the poor father, whom he pitied so much and regarded with such tender faith as a sort of ugly duckling, with grand and beautiful capacities folded in somewhere, was lost and debased and hateful to the very core. She, too, seemed constrained to wait for some interposing prodigy; and it came at last through the medium of Harry. Thinking they had all been silent long enough on that bright, inspiriting morning, or perhaps being touched by the fine, pervading influences,

rare and illimitable as thought, that seemed neither of matter nor of spirit, and yet to govern both, he turned round suddenly and exclaimed, "I hope Mr. Forrest is not going to marry Mamie again! He made everything so nasty. And, Mr. Cameron, he took her away from me, all by himself, in the walks and made her so sorry!"

"Never mind, Harry; I don't think he will do so again," said Mary, with a heightened colour, and a spirit in her tone that pleased Cameron exceedingly.

They were in the by-lanes, and he had to get down to open a gate, and as he put the reins into Mary's hands he looked into her face. What she read from that glance can be imagined, because we know how that rugged brow and the deep grey eyes could radiate the feelings of the strong, tender, and pitying soul. And he must have met some sympathetic grace from Mary's eyes, for when he took his place again, and the reins from her guiding hand, he said, "Perhaps, sometime, Mary, before I am quite an old man?"

To which significant question she replied

with a quiet, half-sad smile, "I shall be dismal and faithless for a long time, and Harry could not do without me."

"He never need! Harry shall help you bear with me and the old violono, Mary, if the time should ever come when you can leave your father."

That night Mrs. Cameron's heart was gladdened by as triumphant an epithalamium as the old violono could develope.

George Cameron was not a man to thrust his own desires and hopes forward to the ruin or even the annoyance of another; he would not take from a failing, erring fellow-creature the one chance of redemption for the glory and joy of his own life. He knew Mary too well to suppose that such an idea would meet with any encouragement; but there was no longer any reason why they should not help each other. Life would be as much stronger as it would be brighter and fairer, now that those two hands were clasped for better and richer, or even for worse, if God should please to call them to a worse.

So the happy, sympathetic instrument did its part well in giving forth joyful,

triumphant, wedding harmonies; for this union was a reality to these two helped and comforted souls, though it might be long before it was a reality for the world's knowledge.

CHAPTER XV.

SACRIFICES.

EVE, flying from the glory that had been the aim of her life, flying too in her radiant beauty and clad with the very vestments of her triumph, was a brilliant and exciting apparition for the wakeful Londoners that May morning. The face so strangely beautiful in its wearied dejection, the starry, mystical ornaments that flashed from the soft, rich robe, induced many curious eyes of romantic housemaids and sentimental clerks to follow in wondering sympathy. They were half in the secret of some elopement of high-life interest; and any cab, going with more than mere business speed in the same direction, was watched with tender interest. The young street vagrants evolved their own idea, and scampered and screamed enough

for a day's work; one, more facetious than his peers in impudence, directed the driver to Buckingham Palace, explaining that his fare, being a foreign princess, was expected there. Indifferent to every thing, except the cuts those enterprising young legs got from her coachman, Eve reviewed her position.

A singular and bold course she had taken, and one she must have been strangely possessed to have conceived—this was certain. The highly-toned excitement had passed from her mind, but not the purpose; that was right and fixed still, taking even a more sacred character and obligation as she approached the distasteful vulgarity of her home. Henceforth there were to be no more glorious aspirations; she had attained her grand standard, had stood in her crowned moment the idol of fine musical souls, a priestess of the art she revered and loved, and the result had pained and shamed her bitterly; so much that it must not recur.

“This false life may be quite right to those who do not feel that it is false,” Eve thought. “Of course it is right, it is beautiful to sing so finely those grand things the masters have

composed on purpose to be sung; but it is trying. It was misery and desecration to me. For Bernard did not care. Bernard does not feel. He was Kelita, truly enough, a hard-hearted, high-souled young Levite, as he is; ready to give up wife and little ones for his legalities and pride. It is right for him, and would be right for me if I could have been the alien wife, and not Eve. Yet I would rather be Eve after all; I would rather be, than seem. Perhaps sometime I may be able to translate those noble things without this pain and shame. Certainly Bernard Fielding shall never sing his sweet, loving, excellent songs, as if there were no heart under my artist robe, any more."

So Eve, like many another maiden, having been wooed and won incontinently, had to endure a sort of typical suttee, in which the very life must have its rite of fire.

Of course nothing of all this could be said at home, and the setting-in was dreary and lonely enough. Though for the higher life there can be no question of the expediency and beauty of any true and intense passion, the trial by flood or fire is terrible not the less.

Will Fletcher had not returned after the opera, having taken himself off, in his chagrin, to get ready for his Australian banishment as he proposed ; and even his cheerful, if weak, companionship was wanting. The women were of course proud enough of their fair and successful young artist, and did all they could to make her life charming to her and useful to themselves. Yet the luxurious meals and gay upholstery of house and person, the superabundance of dead-weight continually before her, even in the society they chose, or which chose them, were all clear against Cameron's little lawless singing-maid, the Graceful Consort of those stirring days, the Evalina, San Serle had delighted to honour, and especially the enthusiastic lover of such a fine abstraction as Bernard Fielding presented. Then it was that Eve longed for a brother who would be as faithful as Will, but more of her own stamp ; or a sister, who would help her to bear and see her way through ; for she did not know how very little young creatures are to each other, each one being too intent upon its own vital problem. And then that mythical father, about whose existence she

had dreamed and speculated, became more necessary and definite, till most of her interest was divided between his idea and Bernard Fielding's. Eve questioned her mother about this much-desired relative, and she, not being able to deceive her with idle nonsense now, confided her difficulty to Mrs. Bray.

"It seems to me as if it must come out now," said she. "The captain's trial will perhaps make an exposure, and I don't see how we can keep the papers from Eve. I do think I should like to tell her all about it."

"Well, Sophy, I always thought you weak-minded, but I never gave you credit for being capable of giving up your character to your own child—to say nothing of the living and position you must lose if Eve should ever know who she is!" Mrs. Bray expostulated, with much force, because she did not know everything, and believed her own prospects would be ruined if Eve knew all.

The meek Sophy retired within herself, as she had done so many times before stronger wills, but she made one more effort for her

case. "Still, you know, if any thing should happen to the captain I shall be free again. I always respected the captain; and you have said very often that he was a fine figure and good-natured to a fault: still I never exactly looked upon him in the light of a husband—I expect people don't, if the choice is not of themselves." This was put in as some apology for the calmness with which she could discuss his probable fate.

"They can only transport him, though it might have been a hanging matter if somebody had not helped to keep back some important evidence," Mrs. Bray remarked coolly. "But as it will be transportation he will be out of the way of helping you; so I should have thought there was all the more reason for keeping a still tongue in your head."

"What are we to do about the newspaper, then? Is Eve to see and hear nothing about it? Why, you yourself, Ann Bray, could scarcely expect me to put such a command on my feelings as to make no comments. Indeed I would not trust you to be always on your guard, especially if you had been to the altar twice."

“You always did run into extremes, Sophy, ever since you set up to be the handsomest and finest girl in Framborough; and Eve takes after you. She is always out of doors now, a-wandering about; and I shouldn’t wonder if she has picked up a lover and will give us no end of trouble. There, she is coming in now, so, if you please, we will say no more about the trial till we see what there is in the paper, and then we can act accordingly.”

Eve had taken to rambling strangely, spending many hours each day in the parks; solitary hours, though with plenty of people about. It was fine spring weather, and that was sufficient to draw her away from the close town house and to quicken the fancies of her teeming soul. It was not in her power to suppress her genius, though she decided upon suppressing some of its rarer manifestations. So she could no more help translating the ideas of the masters she knew and loved, than any poet can help rendering his estimate of the world about him. Her lonely hours, therefore, were full and real in a finer and more lovely way than were

those of the more apparently eloquent throng about her.

Being occupied with so many absorbing and native matters, Eve did not appear likely to give her friends much trouble; but, somehow, even the most absorbed and fertile of minds have their electric points, with their capricious sensitiveness and attractive forces; and Eve had always felt a peculiar interest in the master of Wyckam Hall. It was a shy, reserved feeling in his presence, a persistent recurrence of his words and manner to her mind after she had seen him, which she wondered and smiled at in her own independent way, but which seemed more lingering than most of her childhood's habits. Knowing from Will Fletcher how deeply Mr. Forrest was likely to be involved in Captain Jones's trial, she had thought about him more than usual during the week, and asked for the local newspaper at breakfast-time on the morning of its accustomed appearance, saying the postman must have forgotten them on the one day she cared for his coming. Mrs. Bray's silence and Sophy's peculiar look were not lost upon her, and, being aware how

deeply her mother must be concerned in the details and result of the case, Eve waited until Mrs. Bray went out upon some domestic errand, and then sought for the timid, anxious woman who had shut herself up in her own room to be out of the way with her secret.

The temptation came and could not be resisted. Eve's firm little knock at the bolted door, Eve's sweet yet decided voice, "Mamma, do let me in," repeating with a certain authority her request, were successful. Sophy hid the newspaper and opened the door, as soon as she had wiped the tears from her eyes; but the traces of the tears were there and the flushed, conscious light was on her face. The gentle, daughter-like mood of the intruder, the pride the poor woman had in her beautiful and gifted child, and the excitement of reading Mr. Forrest's evidence in court, quite overcame Mrs. Bray's sophisms and her own dread of probable consequences; and through much weeping and hesitancy, and with some suggestive leadings from Eve, the truth was told.

Sophy's shame seemed to be dissolving into the great, roomy nothingness that so

mercifully receives human cast-off sufferings and passions. It became indeed more like a solemn joy, when Eve, rising from her kneeling position by her side, the glow of her great, joyful surprise making form and face more noble and lovely, and regarding her, the poor faded singer, with a sort of reverence, said, "Mamma, poor Mamma! why you are Mrs. Forrest of Wyckam! and I—who on earth am I?"

That was not to be realized all at once. She walked slowly to the window, feeling as if she must have wider space for the thought of this grand change, but returned very soon to ask why this long silence and estrangement had been suffered to grow so hard and dark; because, as she said, "what has been can never be quite blotted out," adding, with a dignity, simple as touching, "you know, mamma, there was always me."

Sophy explained as well as she could. "Mr. Forrest was so young, younger than I, and people said I misled him. Then he was very changeable and grew tired of me very soon, before we returned to England; and I could not bear to face Madam Forrest,

especially as I knew he did not care for me. If he had loved me, of course it would have been different. I knew, too, it was not a legal marriage. He was under age, and the ceremony was only to please a passing fancy. And, you know, since then, because he wished it, I have been married to Captain Jones."

"Yes," Eve said thoughtfully; "that was wicked."

"I could not help it, Eve dear. Some people must do what others tell them. Mrs. Bray says I am weak-minded, and you have looked as if you thought so too; but I have kept his secret till now. And now you must keep it for us both. You would no more care to claim a father who had disowned you than I did to claim a husband who did not want me."

Limp and faded as she was, and with no pretence to any high quality except this fidelity to one idea, Sophy did not look repugnant to her child, and she kissed her with a feeling she had never shown before.

"Then I am only Eve after all?" she exclaimed, with a touch of her childish sim-

plicity, though there was some consciousness of her own worth in the tone.

"You will not mind very much, shall you, darling? I shall be sorry to have told you if you mind so as to be unhappy," said Sophy, who was, in fact, much happier for this confidence, the captain's mischance notwithstanding.

"Yes, I shall mind, but in a very different way—not in the old fearful, doubtful way any more. Because what has been cannot be as if it had never been, just for a whim."

"You had better go away before Mrs. Bray comes in, dear; she is very suspicious, and I would not have her know I have been talking to you in this way."

"Does not Mrs. Bray know about it?" Eve asked, wondering what reasons she could have, if she knew all, for objecting.

"Not about the marriage—and I must never tell that. She would never let me rest a moment. You know it would be a fine thing for Ann Bray to tell, and to get me righted, as she would call it. She would make herself of more account at Wyckam Hall than she had ever done before."

Eve heard without attending. Unfortunately there was another more potent reason why Sophy's first marriage could not be spoken of, which seemed to have been overlooked. A second marriage had been contracted, and there was no suppression of that fact. Eve had just time to remind her mother of this and to say that she should never regret having told her and trusted her, when Mrs. Bray was heard below.

The strong antipathy she had always had for this overbearing and encroaching woman was intensified, if possible, by the new light that had been thrown upon her social relations, and she felt resolved to free the house from this supervision. Her future career, though vapid enough, would be more tolerable to Eve if she and her mother were alone.

"We will go on as usual for a day or two, but she must go. I can keep the house, Mrs. Cameron taught me that," Eve whispered. "Now I shall go and walk in the park and let the fresh air blow well into all the nooks and crannies of this strange news, till I can realize just where I am in this startling world."

“Yes, dear, run; I hear her step on the stairs now.”

Sophy looked so frightened her daughter's fancy for tempting perilous possibilities was excited, and, putting her finger on her lip and bending forward in a saucy, defiant attitude, she listened for the ascending footsteps, looking as though an encounter from her present vantage-ground would be very welcome.

Sophy's meeker spirit quailed before the threatened intrusion, and she hastily locked the door, making a warning sign at the same time.

Eve had intended to take some little time for reflection before formally routing Mrs. Bray; but quick, unpremeditated action was always more in accordance with her skill and taste, and therefore more likely to be successful than a deliberated plan. She was ashamed and sorry, too, to see her mother so prone and craven before this exacting, vulgar-minded person, whose perpetual presence made their existence seem hopelessly mean, and whose sole claim upon them was of her own will and pleasure. She gave her

head its characteristic little toss and her face radiated mischief as she awaited the signal from without.

Mrs. Bray turned the door-handle with her usual confidence in common rights and special immunities, and, finding an obstacle to her progress, she ejaculated expressively and knocked impatiently. No answer coming, she said, "It's me—Mrs. Bray—you may open the door, Sophy; I daresay Eve is out on her rambles, so we can discuss our plans in peace and quietness."

Eve's face flushed, but she opened the door gently, and, smiling at Mrs. Bray's involuntary start, said, "You can come in, though it is mamma's room, for we have something to say to you. We have been talking over a few things, and we think, all things considered, we can do without you in the future, Mrs. Bray."

Seeing that amazement at this audacity had taken away the power of immediate reply, Eve took advantage of the portentous calm to add, "I think mamma can spend our money pretty well; at least, if she cannot, I can, and she wishes me to be her house-keeper. Do you not, mamma?"

Who could have resisted that impelling question? No command ever came with a more imperious grace. Sophy's eyes fell, but she said, with sufficient decision, "Certainly, my dear."

Mrs. Bray turned her back towards Eve as she said, a whole battery of scorn in tone and look, "It isn't every one as has the strength of mind to insult and give up an old friend just at the very time when her advice and help is most needed, but I might have expected it of you, Sophy Fletcher. I know you don't mean anything, nor ever did, but to be led by the nose by anybody who will take the pains to put a ring in it."

Eve intercepted any reply her mother might be going to make by saying, "I shall not suffer you to speak in that way to my mother, I will not have her insulted by any one."

"Indeed! is it because she is the wife of a highwayman who is to be transported for life beyond the seas?" Mrs. Bray remarked, sarcastically, but still without turning round.

"I did not mean to be angry," said Eve, her voice trembling with only half-suppressed

passion. "I did not mean to have you turned out, but just to dismiss you quietly. Now, I insist upon your going this very day."

Mrs. Bray was not so easily influenced by look and manner as Sophy, still she seemed to prefer not to meet the indignant girl's eyes. "You had better send her out, I have something very particular to say to you," she remarked, as if she had not heard that angry dismissal at all.

Sophy was in a great strait and spoke with mild hesitation, as if she wished to compromise. "I am sure we don't want to be rude to you, Ann Bray, but, you see, Eve is the support of us all; and it is but natural she should prefer her mother. Most young things do hang to their mothers, especially if they fancy any thing is getting in between them; so I think you had better go quietly. You know Eve is not like me."

"Well, no, there's some comfort in that." An acrid repartee did Ann Bray's soul good, even at the expense of its telling in favour of a foe. "I should like to know what has set you two a-conspiring against me, though I don't mean to go out of this house at present."

There are things for me to manage that you would make a pretty hash of. Send that girl out, and I will tell you what."

Eve was trying to suppress her angry feelings that she might see her way through this business, which seemed likely to prove a more difficult matter than she had anticipated. It was very trying to hear herself made of such small account by the ex-housekeeper of Wyckam Hall; so close, too, upon the news of her own connexion therewith. For her mother's sake, and perhaps partly in consideration of this newly-discovered father, she managed to repeat with dignity her request that Mrs. Bray would go and leave them in peace, adding, however, with spirit, "for I mean it."

"I should like to know who you are, miss, to be giving me warning to go?" the irritated woman exclaimed, facing her antagonist at last.

The temptation to retort fully was great. Eve had never felt more roused to independent action, more willing to claim the rights genius had inaugurated, of standing alone and unassailed on her high and noble

position, a position, too, which she had just learned was unassailable. Never in any of her fine translations of intense and glowing sentiments had she looked more supreme. She did not glance towards either of her companions; there was nothing to ally her in the least with either of them. Mrs. Bray's insulting tone had given the key-note to a grand fugue-like train of thought. After all it was not worth her while to be angry with this person who could perceive nothing in this wonderful gift and grace of feeling and of song. It was not for her to explain that she had a name and a place even in the most conventional of social systems. For her mother's sake she might have subdued Ann Bray with the truth—for her father's, she would keep her secret—for her own, she would not be moved.

“ Oh, I am only Eve ! ”

Her mother had heard that simple phrase in Eve's childhood, when it had been a little, lowly plea. She started now at the dignity and humour of the tone. Pliant, easy natures can be stimulated sometimes. Sophy's confession had done her good. She admired

her daughter's self-restraint and perfect unselfishness, and for the first time in her life, perhaps, felt raised from circumstances, even from herself. Up to this moment she had been sitting limp and languid as usual, passive before whatever might take place. Now she rose and looked like a mother who had a good part to take and would accept it.

"Eve knows all," she said. "Ay, she knows more than you do, Ann Bray. For her sake I will tell you who she is if she wishes it, though I should suffer for it."

She looked to Eve for her verdict.

"Never mind, mother, we will keep our secret. It is quite enough *to be* now, we can afford to *seem* any thing people choose."

Mrs. Bray took a crumpled letter from her pocket, and, holding it before Sophy's eyes, remarked, with oracular obscurity, "I suppose that accounts for this, then. I could not make out what could have made Frederick Forrest write to Eve in this fashion. Oh, I don't want your letter," she exclaimed, tossing it to Eve's eagerly outstretched hand. "And I don't want to stop an hour with a woman who could act the hypocrite to her

best friend ; ay, the only one she had, when she needed one most."

Eve and her mother were quite too much interested in their letter to think of vindicating themselves to this injured friend, who left them, without another word, to their fate.

There were but two or three lines stating that he, Mr. Forrest, was going out of the country for some time and wished to see Eve before he went away. "I should like you to come down to Wyckam the day after to-morrow, that will be Monday," the note said, "you can ask your mother about it. If you would rather not come here, I will meet you at Mr. Serle's house on that day. So write at once, telling me which arrangement you prefer."

It was evident Sophy was not included in this beneficent desire, and Eve resented the omission in her heart, though she said nothing about it.

"Shall I go to him, mamma?" she asked, with a very unusual deference to the opinion of another.

"Yes, to be sure, you must go, child, when your father calls to you. His message

has been a long time coming, but I always thought it would come if you grew up handsomely. For he has a heart and a conscience, too, when things don't go against his fine, gentlemanlike tastes."

"What a fortunate thing it is I made up my mind to part with Mrs. Bray! We should never have seen this letter if she had not been vexed," Eve exclaimed, very much elated by this sudden brightening of her dreary prospect. "Everything may turn out well after all."

"He may not make himself known to you; perhaps it is only a whim or a fit of curiosity, or he may wish to make some amends and have done with us for ever," said Sophy, some consecutive ideas unexpectedly developing in her mind. "He always promised me that I should never want, and now that the captain is out of the way, you know, he may feel responsible for us, and just mean to make sure that you will stay by me. If it should be so, and he makes no sign, you had better not say anything about what I have told you, my child."

"I shall say nothing first; and if he is

proud and lofty and treats me as if I were a beggar, I shall be very likely to vex him. Perhaps I need not go at all, because I mean to stay by you."

Poor Eve's sun gleams were very shy and fitful. It was a happy thing for her that she had a brave heart as well as an independent soul. Genius sometimes hurts as well as intensifies a life; but Eve had enough of vital power yet; and though she might suffer, she would not pine. Two or three times she repeated, in her petulant way, "This concern seems quite too shaky for me to have any thing to do with it safely; better keep clear of it." Yet she wrote to the effect that on the following Monday she would start for Wyckam and make her way thither as quickly as she could. The meantime was spent in preparation for appearing before this father in such a way as might jar as little as possible against his fine, gentlemanlike tastes.

CHAPTER XVI.

REPRISAL.

IT must be admitted that Miss Lawson had not passed a very composed night, and that on coming down-stairs on the morning after her brave proposal she was not free from certain tremulous misgivings. The recollection that she had really offered in that moonlight drive to take Frederick Forrest for better, for worse, though in justice to her heart it must be conceded that the worse was just then strikingly in the ascendant, made her brow flush before his salutation and her hand quiver to the detriment of the coffee and the table-cloth. Miss Lawson was not by any means an unworthy type of the female inaugurators of a newly-modelled sex ; still she could not preside at that breakfast-table with her accustomed grace, feeling guilty of an

anomalous sort of chivalry, the age might not recognize as being in good taste; and her Cousin Fred had good taste in manners, whatever his morals might show. She knew he had not followed her into the house after the horse had been taken out of the gig. Her ears were quick, and she had been wide awake for some hours; no step had ascended the stairs; and the big house had felt vacant and uninteresting till three o'clock; then the dogs barked and the cocks crew, and she was sure her surmises were correct, and that he was only returning from some midnight mission, which assumed immense importance to her mind just then.

Forrest was not in such a critical and fastidious condition as usual. His self-complacency, after having undergone many modifications recently, had received a severe shock from his old and valued friend, Mrs. Cameron. Meditation in his lonely midnight walk, this old clear-sighted friend's malediction in his ears, and the consciousness that it was merited at his heart, had not tended to raise his estimate of his own rights and privileges. Mrs. Cameron had borne with his irregularities

wonderfully; she had even condoned his singular consignment of his daughter and his disgraceful marriage, though he had always felt so very much ashamed of that as a proceeding not to be condoned. Not till he had proposed to set aside for ever this vulgar marriage, with her son's help, did she turn her back upon him and, with corrosive scorn, declare herself ashamed of him.

His conduct, in truth, regarded from her point, with its purpose of bringing Eve before the public only to brand her and debase her, was infamous. He did not know how it was that he had such an aptitude for getting into unpleasantly low situations when he would fain summer on fair and healthful heights. He loved the sweet breezes of the higher regions, glimpses of the best and bravest; even the pure, celestial lights that can only rest on a righteous way, he could conceive of and desire with whatever force his wavering soul could muster; and yet he was lower down, and his future was more hopelessly murky than ever. The things he had done had never seemed so very much out of the right at the time; they were, indeed,

convenient and pleasant, or, rather, forced upon him by plausible circumstances; and yet, after a while, with the light of other minds upon them, they were ungenerous and wrong.

Forrest saw his cousin's blush and liked her the better for it, though it brought rather a higher tinge than usual to his own brow. They could not either look or converse with the ease and vivacity which were so natural to their relationship and long friendship; and Lucy was rapidly becoming convinced that she had indeed made an irretrievable error by her inversion of nature's privileges, and her reflections were of a most confusing kind.

Perhaps Fred saw and had compassion on her. He must have been aware that she was not wholly without excuse; their intimacy had been a long and close one, they had talked about marriage plenty of times. When she had overcome this strange consciousness, he must be given to understand that this, too, was a playful attack; but, unfortunately, when a man is in danger of drowning he wants a strong hand and a hempen cord, and it would be cruel to make a flaunt of flower wreaths before him.

He put on his strong boots and his field-gaiters and gloves with an abstracted air, looking towards her occasionally as if he had something to say. When quite fortified for a rough country walk, he remarked upon the light, gay dress she was wearing with some dissatisfaction.

"I wish you had brought a different sort of gown with you, Lucy. I meant to ask you to go farming with me, but you are not prepared for hedge and ditch casualties; and you know I am a cross-country farmer, on foot or horseback."

Lucy started up with the utmost readiness and pleasure—what was a silken gown or a festival bonnet, or even a cruel and unseemly cold, in comparison with the chance of what might be the issue of taking Fred in his present low mood?

"I will be with you in a moment—my gown is nothing," she asserted, as she hastened from the room before he could protest against the risks that might ensue.

The gown was pinned up, a cloak and pair of boots clumsy enough to please any

one were borrowed from one of the maids; and Lucy was marching by her cousin's side through the fields as if morning dew and yellow, adhesive mud were her most congenial elements, and the great splashing, demonstrative pointer and the flabby, caressing setter her especial familiars.

Still Fred said nothing. That is to say, he talked incessantly about the weather and the crops, and wire-worms and young rooks, declaring he would not have one bird shot this year, and see if they would prefer the worms to the seeds. "There is no good to be gained without a sacrifice of some sort, is there, Lucy?" he observed, with what seemed like a sinister smile.

The morning was warm and damp and her boots and cloak were heavy, but she went cheerfully forward for an hour or two, waiting for a pause and hoping for a change of topic. A pause came at last before a gap in a hedge she was expected to struggle through. There was a ditch on the other side, with the clay banks and a turnip field beyond—no matter! Lucy liked difficulties with Fred. His attention must be drawn to her while a foot had to be extricated or false steps retrieved.

Of course she understood the absurdity of expecting any thing very particular in the bare open fields, with those physical difficulties of getting along at all. Still he might lead her by another path; there was the wood not so very far off—he could meet Mary Elton there—and there were the brookside road and hedge-rows all available if he chose.

The farming was done, however—the sheep counted, the weeders seen and counselled, the homeward way taken in the same common-place manner, and no sign was made. Men must be autocrats in love, whatever revolutions society may effect in weightier matters. Lucy was as helpless before this great desire of her soul, as if the potent and self-willed being beside her were literally holding the little fluttering, impatient essence in his hand. Perhaps he was enjoying this mysterious sweet power for the last time.

When the pair got back to the yard-gate Mr. Forrest said, “We need not go in unless you are tired. It wants an hour till dinner-time. Are you tired, Lucy?”

Oh, no, she was not at all tired; but she did not turn towards the fields again.

“Shall we go and look up the eggs?”

This had been a very favourite bit of dutiful pastime in former days; but it was not a grateful proposal or in very good taste just then. Lucy's feelings were not consistent with standing on tip-toe at all sorts of critical points, arms and neck outstretched towards this capricious and lordly personage, to receive the delicate little deposits at his hands; while he executed various gymnastics, half droll, half graceful, before her—swinging himself into hay-racks and cop-lofts or squeezing his fine person into corners the fowls had chosen as likely to be particularly their own, whence he could look down triumphantly and waggishly into her upturned eyes. The state of mind for egg-hunting ought to be an easy one at any rate; if it can be a trifle light, so much the better for its success—understanding this, and thinking her cousin thoughtless or tantalizing, she declined.

“Come, then, we will go and see how the garden grows,” said Forrest, as if the thought had only just come into his head, though he had been leading himself in that direction with certain ends in view all the morning.

Lucy helped in opening the glass slides of his forcing beds and noticed the growth of the garden with becoming interest, though it is very probable she was mentally trying to solve world-old and much-vexed questions all the time. He cut some little wooden forks very carefully to peg down the straggling shoots and pinched off the superfluous buds, and then led her to the haw-haw to see the pea-fowl that were marching about the paddock below.

"I like to see the fine fellows," Forrest remarked, as though addressing himself. "They enjoy their privilege of courtship so assuredly. It must be very fine to be so certain of one's merits and of one's right to display them."

"I think I prefer being certain of the merits of another," Lucy replied; love making strange revolutions in her little worldly heart, or she could not have stood in the shade for any other person's sake.

"The idea has occurred to me, my fair cousin, that as women are so much more fair and graciously invested than their opposite sex, and as they are exceptional in having

these advantages over the other female creatures, perhaps we men are wrong in expecting to be the wooers as well as the winners. You might only have been reviving an old prerogative when you proposed to take me, with all my imperfections and accretions, last night."

"Fred, you are ungenerous!" Lucy exclaimed, her really good temper tried at last. "Why can you not take what I said last night as a jest? Why make such a great matter of one little foolish speech?"

"Because the circumstances were different last night; and I don't think you have it in your heart to taunt a man when he is low and miserable. I don't believe you were jesting; but if you were, say so, Lucy, and I will not tease you with my own troubles any more."

As no other reply came than a deepening glow on a downcast face, Forrest went on: "After you left me last night, late as it was, I went to Framborough to ask George Cameron to assist me in disannulling my unfortunate engagement with Sophy Fletcher. I thought it might be done easily, considering

my youth, its irregular circumstances, and Sophy's marriage with Jones. Mrs. Cameron reminded me sternly, but justly enough, that I had no right to bring poor little Eve forward simply to make her suffer, and I feel she is right. It would be unmanly to expose Sophy to the evil consequences of an act which originated with myself, however remotely; and it would be unnatural to disgrace my own child. Do you not think so, Lucy?" He put her hand within his arm, as he spoke, and turned from the happy, flaunting birds and the bright sunlight into the shady plantation.

Her hand trembled so she would fain have withdrawn it and gone away to evade the answer which was so difficult to give. Of course she agreed with him, for she was neither wrong-headed nor hard-hearted; but if she said so, her own fate would be sealed. She had encouraged a latent idea that if the engagement, as he called his bond with Sophy, were so slightly formed and so palpably broken, there could be no particular reason for dragging it before the public gaze now. It had been a secret for twenty years, and if he

had not been so careless and impetuous at the trial, and then rushed off to the Camerons in the middle of the night to betray himself, it might have remained a secret for ever. She could never regard them as married, and she did not imagine her cousin had so regarded himself, or why should he have thought of Mary Elton?

"I suppose it is Miss Elton who has made you so wonderfully conscientious all at once?" she said; and then she wished she had not so spoken, for Fred recoiled, evidently, and did not reply.

After a painful and constrained pause, he said, "You know my conscience interfered in that affair, and you stimulated it then, telling me I had no right to take her at her valuation of me; and I did not think I had any right to make my warm-hearted cousin less honourable overtures. If Cameron had fallen in with my mood, or if his mother had been in bed, as she ought to have been, all might have been arranged pleasantly enough for the present, and for you and me."

"Have you seen this Eve since she went away?" Lucy asked rather distantly.

"Yes; I went to hear her in Serle's opera. She is a beautiful, and apparently a high-spirited girl, with enough of talent to make her own fortune good."

"You had better write to her. She will hear all about herself now, and you might as well acknowledge her. Very likely she will not care for you, but prefer her own life with the London professionals and public to idolize her. But if she should choose to come here, and you should wish her to do so, I will stay to receive her."

"Thank you, Lucy; you were always kind. We shall never cease to be friends, I fancy?" Forrest spoke earnestly, for he was half afraid Lucy might be inclined to sink the cousinship, and so be nothing at all to him.

His relation to Eve, so unrealized and strange, could afford but small satisfaction for some time, even if she consented to give up her profession for him and the lonely farmhouse.

Lucy had not any idea of making such tragic sacrifices for a sentiment. This cousin was preferred to any one else still, and he had been tested repeatedly. At twenty she had

been hopelessly in love with him, when his secret had been discovered; at thirty she had avenged herself by as many flirtations as she could stimulate. Now she might reasonably gather her rose-buds from his garden, at least so long as no more privileged hand withheld them. To set his mind at rest on this issue, she declared, with smiling ingenuousness, that she thought they were too essentially one to fall apart; society would hardly interpose to make two miserable units of them now. "But," said she, presuming upon the warmth of the moment, "you must stay at home and mind your farm and not heed the little venomous darts that may be aimed at you and your fair fame for some time to come. If you go abroad and neglect your home and friends because Framborough is censorious, I will not answer for the consequences."

"Very well; at least I will not take my flight till I have seen Eve. With a kindly cousin and a daughter in the world, it must be a man's own fault if his home is lonely."

"I see some lilac drapery fluttering about the bushes; perhaps Sally is coming to see after her boots."

“Or to take an idea of courtship for the enlightenment of the kitchen aspirants—or perhaps it is an innocent hint that dinner waits,” Forrest replied, as he turned into the wider path that led them towards the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOME.

THOUGH Eve's note of assent to Mr. Forrest's invitation had been forwarded, she kept her mother and herself in a whirl of indecision during the intervening hours. To go or not to go?—she might have been a child pulling daisy petals or puffing dandelion parachutes, she felt so unbalanced and at the mercy of a fate she might invoke and then despise. Still the preparations went on as if she had drifted from her own keeping, and on Saturday night a little farewell note was sent to Mr. Serle, thanking him for all his goodness, and saying that the writer was going to Framborough on particular business for a week. Eve had a purpose in sending this bit of news to Mr. Serle. She had renounced his guardianship in a moment of

excitement, and when only one lonely course of living seemed possible; now she needed his counsel and hoped he might call on Sunday night and tell her what to do. She thought she should do well to take his advice and confide the secret of her birth to him. If there were any latent idea that this kind friend would indeed befriend her to the very utmost, and, while keeping faith with her, let Bernard Fielding know who she, poor lonely, unconnected Eve, really was, and that perhaps Bernard might not flout her if chance threw them across each other's path again, Eve scarcely realized to her own mind. It is one of the privileges of love to have its glammers and little wilful wiles, and not to tell too much.

Mr. Serle opened Eve's note over his breakfast on Sunday morning; and his face assumed a peculiar, puzzled expression as he placed it under a hot muffin plate, instead of passing it to his sister according to his custom when their letters were before them. She was surprised, having no idea that any mystery could come in between them now, after thirty years of happy confidence, and

regarded him and his trifling attempts at self-reliance with curiosity and expectation.

“I wonder whether Bernard Fielding means to come in this morning?” he remarked, after a silent minute or two. “Dinny, are girls in earnest when they ask you to promise not to betray their little heart secrets?”

“That must depend upon circumstances, and chiefly on their stages of development. I have known cases in which the secrets were confided as so much invested capital, put out at interest on highly speculative terms. I should fancy this is a case in point.”

As Miss Serle made this suggestive reply, Bernard came and took his place at the breakfast-table, and his appearance seemed to increase Mr. Serle’s moodiness. Presently Serle took the note from under the plate and, after again glancing over it, read the chief part of the contents aloud. They were as follows :—

“Eve has found her proper name, and it is worth having and keeping. She has found her father too, and is going to Framborough on Monday morning to see if he be worth having and keeping. Of course this is

a secret of as much importance as the one Mr. Serle found out for himself the other day."

"Does she say who this father is?" Bernard asked quickly.

"No; but as he is a Framborough man, and with an honourable name, we need not be at a loss concerning him. Dinorah, we little thought we were making felons of ourselves when we enticed the impatient birdling from the parent nest."

"It is not Mr. Cameron!" Bernard exclaimed, with decision. "He never did anything clandestine in his life. I have known him ever since I could see, and his life is a fairly-written book to be read by all men."

"No, it certainly is not Mr. Cameron," Miss Serle said. "There is not a line or shade of identification. But I think I know who it is. Little hints of some familiar harmony were always floating about Eve; but I could never get at the key. It is wonderful how stupid people of decided superiority can be!"

"Who is it, Dinny? You know I can never bear the suspense of riddles, and this is the most painful conundrum of my life."

Bernard had found the key ; he had been in court when Mr. Forrest so nearly confessed to a private marriage, and his artistic mind traced out the similitudes quickly.

"It is Mr. Forrest !" he said. "But how has Eve discovered this, and what can be taking her to him ?"

"That forlorn mother of hers must have been exercising some woman's rights at last," Mr. Serle rejoined, seeming almost breathless with these rapid developments ; adding, more in his usual indolent way, "Is it possible that Mr. Forrest's consent must be asked to a marriage with my fair and gracious Evalina ?"

He spoke carelessly, but his sister detected the acute glance that was reading whatever Bernard's soul might have to tell. His face was to be relied upon for something.

"Oh, this is the secret of importance that you found out for yourself the other day, is it ?" Bernard asked, with a rapidity that was meant to prevent any confusion from becoming manifest.

"What do you mean ? I have not betrayed this confidence, though I think I ought to betray it before Eve gets into the

meshes of an ordinary young lady. What do you think, Dinorah?"

"As you have not confided in me, I cannot form an opinion. There, the bell has ceased and we are all missing the morning service! Bernard, are you not ashamed of us?" Miss Serle said coolly, putting forth her hand for Eve's note, that she might see for herself if anything more was to be made out from it.

"An old friend's engagement may well absorb us for one day. San must feel rather forgetful of the order of the days," Bernard remarked, with a shy look towards the enviable man.

Serle stroked his flowing hair as if his feelings required a sedative, while he said, with almost his usual complacency, "The night of my opera, Bernard, I sat up till Eve arose, that I might ask her to be my wife. I shall never sit in that chair again; it might recall the state of mind in which I passed that night; and I am no penitent to court a needless pain or an idle temptation."

"I think you might have told me that you.

were coveting my Graceful Consort all this time," said Bernard rather warmly.

"Why, my dear boy, if Adam had met his Eve with the indifference you have displayed all this time there would have been but little harmony in Eden! Unless," Serle went on, pensively, "unless it has always been the way with these fair Eves, to love even as they list, and let the wooing be."

"What does he mean? Is he not engaged, then?" Bernard asked, turning quickly towards Miss Serle.

"I believe Eve's affections were set elsewhere—so she told him—but he has not mentioned the favoured object. I suppose that young Will, her cousin, got them before she knew their worth."

"How dreadful you are, Dinny! I never thought a woman could be such a hard impediment," Serle said, with some irritation.

Bernard looked up with heightened colour. "I guessed this long ago," he said. "I am very sorry she has been victimizing you too."

"I think he will get over it. This is the sixth grand passion my brother has outlived."

Bernard's imperial notions of love would

have been outraged under other circumstances. At present he seemed rather glad that it was not always a tragedy.

“Assuredly, a man must take his friends into his counsel if he would estimate himself modestly. Still I could never have imagined that even my dearest and nearest, my own familiar friend would have supposed that I must be set aside for a Will Fletcher! No, I am happy in knowing that I yield to no ignoble rival; and I only hope he will know how to make good his advantage.”

Mr. Serle made such eloquent grimace Bernard could not even seem indifferent; and Dinorah laughingly said, “Whoever trusted you with a secret, San, must have known but little of you or have laid her plans with extreme delicacy. Bernard, we shall be in time for the canon’s sermon, and if you are wise you will retreat before you are made an accomplice in your own despoise.”

She left the room as she spoke, to dress; but Serle would not be silenced now that he had made a partial revelation.

“Bernard is an accomplice already, by a diviner right than any I shall ever exercise,”

said he. Then, glancing ingenuously from his own rather faded reflection in the mirror to the immortal-looking young man, he added, with a slight pathos in his tone, "I don't know but that I would as lief make over this little part to you, Bernard. Somehow it seems to befit you better than me. It takes a bold genius to defy the harmonies and still educe beauty and perfectness, and I am not bold—and then there is Dinorah! No, it could never have been. Stay a moment, you will go to church with my sister?"

"Not to-day," Bernard replied hurriedly. "Do you think I am a marble form, to be crowned or unwreathed with gracious indifference?"

"Good-bye, then. I suppose I shall not see you again at present?" Serle asked, and waited for the reply.

"I think not at present."

"It is to be, Dinorah, we may conclude, or he would not be rushing away to Framborough on the spur of the moment," Mr. Serle remarked, as his sister entered.

"Did he say he was going to Framborough?"

"No ; but of course he is ; and he has left me to go to church with you, and intimates that we shall not meet again for some time."

"Indeed ! Still I think he has only gone to hide his face."

Mr. Serle never thought of going to advise with Eve upon her happy discovery ; all right in her and her affairs being so clearly given over to another. Still she looked for him all day, not leaving the house lest he should be missed, and retiring at night disappointed and chagrined, and with half a mind to put her journey by. The morning brought back the native adventurous mood, and she dressed with care, attending to the hints her mother had given about Mr. Forrest's refined taste in dress, even trying the relative merits of two bonnets from his point of view. She hoped he liked pink, most gentlemen did, especially if they were not very young gentlemen, and it suited her rich black dress so well.

When Eve went down to breakfast her consternation was great at seeing her mother also prepared for travelling.

"I thought you might not like it, dear, so I

said nothing; but it is quite impossible that you can go to Wyckam Hall alone; Mr. Forrest knows that, and though he has not mentioned it, he would blame me in his mind," she explained.

"But, mamma, it will look as if we were going to crush ourselves in; and indeed I am not going to stop at Wyckam."

Sophy's face flushed. "That must be as he pleases," she replied, with the old habit of deference. "He means you to stay, or he would not have written; besides, you are a young lady, and ought to be in your proper place; that is, if he thinks so. My home is not good enough for Miss Forrest."

Grateful as that title sounded to poor Eve—so grateful indeed that her very self seemed all glorified, not as with the specious, dazzling glory of her professional triumphs, but with the fair excellence of a true and honourable womanhood—still it was contrary to the nature she had been growing into, to suffer herself to be handed over and absorbed as others might please. She sighed one moment in the superabundance of gratified desire, and in the next shook her head at the idea of

giving up her independence to this capricious and untried parent just as he should please.

As Sophy uttered this name, so coveted and so long suppressed, and saw so much grace and beauty in her talented child, she felt more humbly than ever that she could not expect to keep by her; but she would minister as long and as near as possible. She fancied Eve's hesitation and reluctance to her company proceeded partly from pride or shame in her poor mother.

"I shall not hamper you, dear," said she meekly. "I shall be taken for your maid, most likely; and you need not mind me more than you like. I will not even go up to the hall so as to be seen; and I shall stay with my brother Dan until you have settled for the future. Perhaps Dan may need me now he has no one else; we may be alike in that."

Eve answered her mother with a tender, pitying smile. "If I should stay at Wyckam after all—but I shall not—yet if something quite improbable should keep me at Framborough—I should like you to be near. Kitty told me how pretty and pleasant Abbey Court was, and we might perhaps make it

nice and comfortable for you. Are you really quite ready? It is time our coach was here."

"Quite ready, darling. I have been at work all night."

Twilight was deepening, and Eve and her mother thought they must be getting near the end of their journey. It would be too dark for Eve to be set down at the toll-bar and find her way alone through the Wyckam fields—very dreary, and not consistent with the tone of her spirit, to present herself alone and unannounced at the door of Wyckam Hall. They decided upon going on to the coach office and taking a fly, and then, as Eve said, "making the best of it."

Instead of driving through the toll-bar the coach stopped, and some one scrambled down from the roof and opened the door. The oil-lamp flickered bewilderingly, but it certainly was Bernard Fielding who spoke.

"Jump out, Eve. Here's a carriage from Wyckam; and I think Miss Lawson is here waiting to take you home."

How strange, yet how natural it all seemed! Eve kissed her mother; she could not speak;

then she gave her hand to Bernard, who led her up to the little carriage and gaily introduced her to the kindly Lucy. Eve took the vacant seat by her side and Bernard, without giving any reason for such an eccentric way of getting home, placed himself behind them.

What did he mean? Had he known Eve so well and so long and never thought of loving her till he had discovered that she was not without a seemly investiture of family and name? Bernard would have been sorely ashamed so to judge of himself. The probability is, that those whose lives are devoted to art, and who exist in an ideal world, require some hint from without, a flash from another mind, not so much to reveal a fair excellence they would do well to appropriate, as to show them that they are desiring it already, waiting, like the grey and patient morning, for the light to break.

Eve gave herself as little trouble about his motives as about the issue of her visit to Wyckam. All she cared to know was, that instead of making her way lonely and spiritless to the home of her father, creeping in like some illicit, neglected thing, to be looked

at and tested, and perhaps scorned, she was being borne along in a sort of ecstatic triumph. The fresh night breeze from the fields was a chrism as it passed over her brow ; she was a happy, glorified Eve, blissful and tender already, and quite prepared for any good life might have in store.

THE END.

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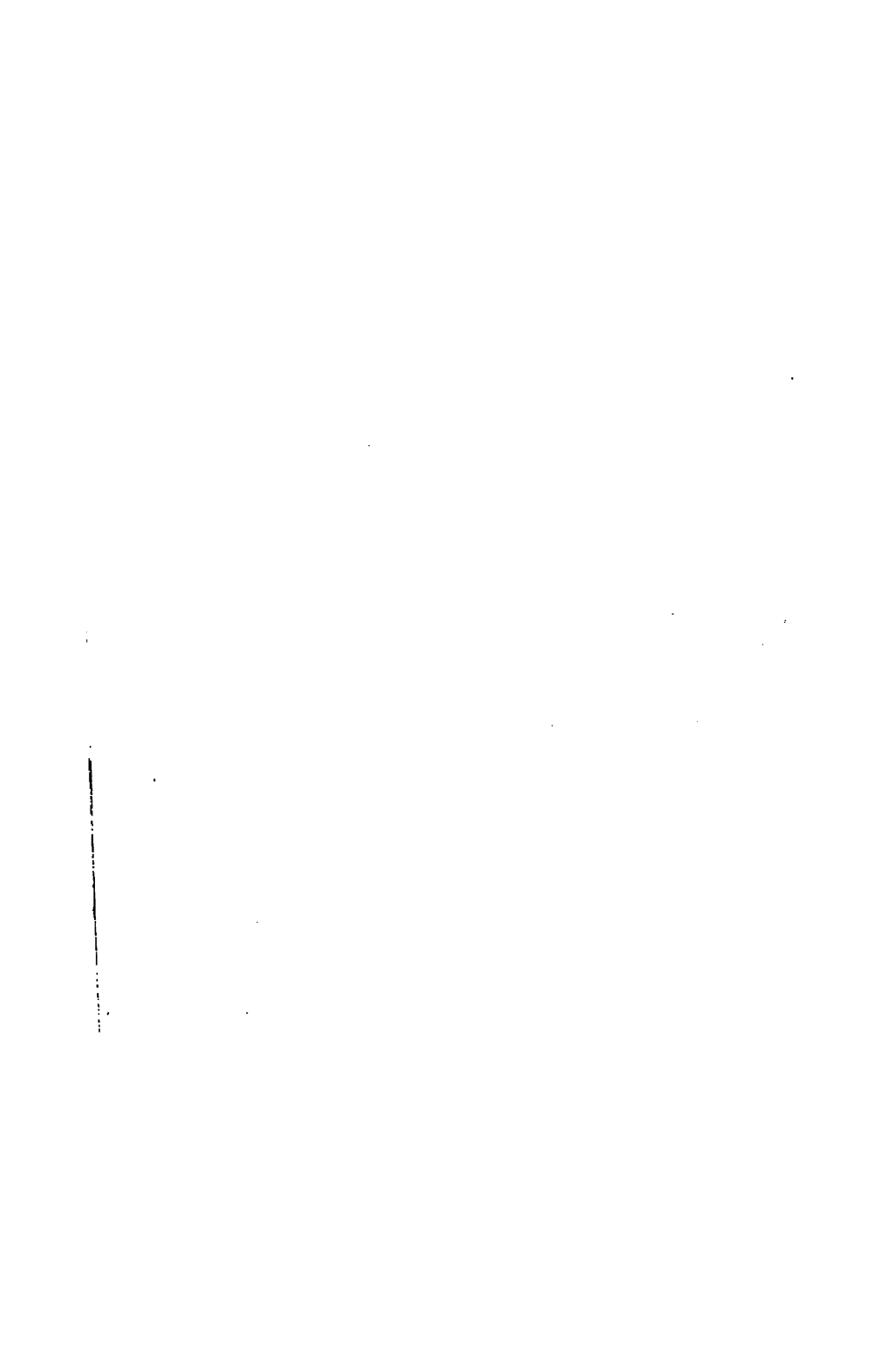
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